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THE GILBERTS & THEIR GUESTS.

A STORY OF HOMELY ENGLISH LIFE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY JULIA DAY,

AUTHOR OF "THE OLD ENGAGEMENT."

VOL. I.

London:

T. CAUTLEY NEWBY, PUBLISHER,
30, WELBECK STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.

1858.

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THE GILBERTS & THEIR GUESTS.

CHAPTER I.

“No more tea for me, my dear,” said Mr. Gilbert to his wife, setting down his cup on the large, round table, where the shining urn was pleasantly hissing, and at which his family were seated enjoying their evening meal, “no more tea for me. Andrew, my boy,” he continued, turning to his son, a youth of some sixteen years of age, “we must not stop idling here, however agreeable it may be, we must go back to the office.”

“Already!” said Mrs. Gilbert, looking com-

passionately at her husband, "and I see that you are suffering from that sad, wearisome pain in the head."

"I am," he answered, "but nevertheless I must go to work," and followed by his son, he passed out of the room.

The girls, who had been chatting and laughing together, continued their lively conversation, but Mrs. Gilbert did not, as usual, take part in their cheerfulness; she sat for awhile silent, and with an expression of anxiety on her countenance; and it was not till Janet, the neat little parlour-maid, had cleared the table, trimmed the lights, and briskly stirred the fire, and the two elder girls had begun industriously to apply themselves to the tasks, with which the family work-basket furnished them, that she was roused from her abstracted mood. Little Rhoda, the youngest of the party, coming softly beside her, put into her hands a ball of white wool and the ivory knitting-needles, which it was her custom dexterously to ply during the leisure of the evening. Mrs. Gilbert pressed a kiss on the forehead of her little

daughter, and almost mechanically began to work, but as she did so, unconsciously she drew a long breath, which seemed very like a sigh.

"Mamma," said Rhoda, who still stood beside her, "you will want the scarlet wool soon, what a beautiful shawl it will be! and how proud Emily will be to wear it."

"That I shall indeed," said the eldest girl, looking up brightly from her task.

"What a handsome shawl Charlotte Harris had on to-day," said her sister Fanny; "I am sure it must have cost a great many guineas. I felt quite ashamed of my old plaid by the side of it."

"Mr. Harris has some right to dress his daughters expensively," remarked Mrs. Gilbert.

"And yet he is only a solicitor like papa," rejoined Fanny.

"But he has ten times more business than papa has," said Emily, "only see what a number of clerks he keeps."

"And what style he lives in," added Fanny, "what a handsome carriage he drives, and as to

Mrs. Harris and Charlotte and Eliza they seem quite to look down upon us."

"Your father will never be able to live as Mr. Harris lives," said Mrs. Gilbert, "he is too conscientious to grow rich."

"Yes," said Emily, stopping short in her work, and proudly lifting her head, "Papa is called the honest lawyer all over the town; good old Davis has told me that a hundred times."

"Ah, poor old Davis!" sighed Mrs. Gilbert, "I wish with all my heart your father had been able to keep him."

"So do I," said Emily, "and I am sure the good old man would gladly have worked on in the office for nothing, if his little savings had been enough for him to live on."

"I can go on with the comforter that I began knitting for him, now I have finished winding this wool for mamma," said Rhoda.

"Do so, my love; the good soul will be pleased with your kindness, and will be proud to wear the work of his little favourite," answered Mrs. Gilbert.

“Mamma,” asked Emily, “do you think it was Edmund’s extravagance that obliged papa to part with poor Davis?”

“Yes, my dear; the payment of your brother’s debts, together with the expenses of his outfit and passage money, left your father, for this year at least, without the means of affording himself a clerk.”

“Poor dear Edmund,” cried Emily, “by this time he must be half-way to New Zealand.”

“Andrew is I hope beginning to be a little useful in the office,” said Mrs. Gilbert.

“I daresay he is,” rejoined Emily, “but he will never be what Edmund might have been; he has not his talents.”

“No,” said Mrs. Gilbert, “your father says Andrew’s abilities are of a very moderate order; but I am much mistaken if he has not good sense enough to keep in the right path, and if so it will be of more worth than all his brother’s cleverness.”

“It is my belief that Edmund will turn out a fine character yet, one of these days,” said Emily.

"Oh, Emily," cried Fanny, "you are always so hopeful."

"That is why I am so much happier than you are, as you continually insist is the case."

"You don't feel things as I do," said Fanny.

"No, I don't feel that because there are clouds to-day there will be no blue sky to-morrow."

Fanny sighed and made no reply.

"My dear girls," said Mrs. Gilbert, after a short pause, "I do wish we could hit on any plan of lightening your father's labour."

"Oh, so do I, mamma," exclaimed Emily; "but what can we do?"

"In the first place we must all be as economical as possible," answered Mrs. Gilbert; "and then I have thought of a plan by which your father might be enabled to afford a salary to a clerk. You can recollect that before I married your father I was living here at the vicarage with Mr. and Mrs. Maynard."

"To be sure we can," said Emily, "our own poor mamma used to take us there very often to see you. It was a long time ago."

“Yes, it was ten years ago,” answered Mrs. Gilbert, “and I had then lived there three years.”

“And three years afterwards,” said Emily, with an affectionate smile, but her eyes full of tears, “you came here to make us all happy after our great sorrow.”

Rhoda threw aside her work and clasped her arms round Mrs. Gilbert’s neck; “you have been such a kind mamma,” she whispered.

“And you such a dear good child,” said Mrs. Gilbert, fondly returning the caress.

“Do sit down and be still, Rhoda, you are interrupting mamma,” cried Fanny, impatiently.

Rhoda silently went back to her place and took up her knitting, but for a moment her little fingers trembled and her cheeks flushed.

“Well, mamma,” said Emily, who had recovered from her transient emotion, “what was it you were going to tell us?”

“It was this, my love: for the home which was afforded me at the vicarage I paid one hundred and fifty pounds a year, and a very com-

fortable and happy home I had there. Now, it has occurred to me that if we could meet with a lady to live with us on the same terms, this addition to our income might obviate the necessity of your dear father's denying himself the assistance of a clerk."

"Oh, what a dear clever mamma you are! What a delightful scheme it is!" exclaimed Emily.

"The difficulty will be how to carry it out," said Mrs. Gilbert, "I am a little doubtful whether your father will consent to the plan, and if he should, where are we to find the lady?"

"Oh, papa will be coaxed over, I am sure," said Emily, "and as to the lady, when once we set about it in good earnest I dare say we shall be able to find her."

"I hope she will not be a cross old maid," cried Fanny.

"Why should you think she should be an old maid at all," rejoined Emily, "why should she not be an interesting widow or a very charming

young lady, or why should not a delightful person like mamma come to live with us?"

"How I do hate flattery," muttered Fanny.

"So do I; you know Fanny that I do," exclaimed Emily, vehemently.

"It is a pity that you talk then in such a high flown manner," rejoined her sister; "but you are for ever flying into some rhapsody or other; I am sure Miss Dale must have thought you wild this morning when you were telling her about Edmund's letter."

"Oh, mamma," cried Rhoda, "do you think you could persuade Miss Dale to come and live with us?"

"No, my love; Miss Dale has her own home and her own pursuits."

"But I do think," said Emily, "she might be happier with us than living as she does quite alone, now that she has lost so much of her property, and is obliged to live in such a small way. And what two nice rooms we could give her; there is that pleasantest of all pleasant bedrooms, with the pretty chintz furniture, and

the nice grate and marble mantel shelf; and then there is the little back parlour; our study, as we used to call it, so quiet and so comfortable; snug and warm in the winter, and quite charming in the summer, looking into, what Miss Dale calls our quaint old garden, and with her books and paintings in it, and above all with herself there, what a delightful room it would be."

"Now, Emily, what is the use of saying so much about what never can happen?" cried Fanny, "of course Miss Dale would not think of leaving her own home to come and live with us?"

"No, indeed, Emily, you must not think of realizing anything so agreeable as that would be," said Mrs. Gilbert, "we must be content if we can meet with some stranger who is in search of a home, instead of a friend already provided with one."

"I declare after thinking of Miss Dale, the very idea of a stranger makes one feel cold," said Emily, with an expressive shrug.

"Well, I must call that affectation," exclaimed Fanny.

The hasty rejoinder of her sister was interrupted, for at that moment a tolerably loud knock at the street door was heard.

"Who on earth can that be at this time of the evening?" cried Fanny.

"Some one come to your father on business most likely," answered Mrs. Gilbert.

"No," said Emily, "the knock would have been at the office door if it had been that."

"It is Doctor Basset, perhaps, coming to hear how your father is, with his kind excuse of looking in for half-an-hour's gossip," suggested Mrs. Gilbert.

"No, no, it is not his knock," said Emily.

"I hear some one coming up stairs," whispered Rhoda.

"Perhaps," observed Fanny, "it is the stranger coming to give Emily a shivering fit in good earnest."

But when Janet threw open the door and announced "Mr. Surrey," the general exclamation of delight, no less than of surprise, manifestly proved that the visitor who entered was not a stranger.

"This is an unlooked for pleasure," cried Mrs. Gilbert, stepping forward to welcome him with a friendly smile and a cordial pressure of the hand.

"Ah, Mr. Surrey," said Emily, frankly extending her hand also, "this is quite your old way, giving us such a charming surprise."

"It is so very long since we have seen you," said Fanny, coming forward in her turn to shake hands.

"So very long," said Mr. Surrey, "that I seem to be unrecognized by one of my old friends," and he stooped down and drew Rhoda towards him. "Have you quite forgotten me?"

"Oh, no," she answered, readily returning his kiss, and locking her small hand in his, "oh, no, I remember you quite well!"

"And our rambles through the old copse? and our searching after primroses?"

"Yes; and the primrose roots are in my garden now, and they will be in flower next month."

Mr. Surrey, who was a near relation of Mrs.

Gilbert's, had, from time to time, visited her since her marriage, and her little step-daughter, Rhoda, was an especial favourite with him. Simple in his habits and tastes, the society of this unsophisticated family was a pleasant relief from the solitude he preferred when immersed in literary pursuits. And now he fell at once into his place in the family circle.

"In the pleasure of seeing you so unexpectedly we are quite forgetting our hospitality," said Mrs. Gilbert. "Have you dined?"

"Long ago, but I should have no objection to a cup of tea, and a slice of dry toast or a biscuit."

"Oh!" cried Emily, laughing, "how well I remember your old liking for a biscuit—a hard, dry biscuit! I am so glad you are come back just the same as ever!"

"Just the same in more ways than in my predilection for a dry biscuit," he answered.

"So much the better; I delight in the old ways of old friends," said Emily.

"Even when the old friends are so unfortunate as to be old bachelors?"

“Yes, but indeed you don’t seem at all like one.”

“We must do our best to comfort him under his misfortune,” said Mrs. Gilbert, “and here comes the tea.”

“This is pleasant,” said Mr. Surrey, sitting down to the table, and receiving a cup of tea from the hands of Emily, whilst Rhoda stood smilingly before him, holding a plateful of his favourite biscuits, “this is pleasant to find everything as kind, and as snug, and as cosy as ever. This is rather better than spending a solitary evening at the hotel.”

“At the hotel!” exclaimed Mrs. Gilbert, “you could never think of the hotel, William, with our house close at hand?”

“I have ordered a bed and left my luggage there,” answered Mr. Surrey.

“Then, indeed, you must countermand your order, and have your luggage brought here at once.”

“No, no, you are very kind, not to-night; but I will come to-morrow and spend a week with

you before I go on to London. But now I want to know how Mr. Gilbert is?"

"I am sorry to say he is not altogether as well as we could wish. But you will like to see him. Rhoda, my dear, run to the office and tell your papa that Mr. Surrey is here."

And Rhoda skipped out of the room.

"My little pet is as charming as ever," said Mr. Surrey.

"She is a dear little creature; but you find her less grown than you might have expected; she is extremely small for her years," replied Mrs. Gilbert.

"She is but a fairy, certainly."

"She is still quite childish in her ways, though by no means backward in intellect," said Emily.

"And therein lies infinite charm," remarked Mr. Surrey.

"Unfortunately, she does not grow prettier," said Fanny.

"There is so much expression in her countenance that it leaves nothing to be wished in the way of beauty," he rejoined.

“That is precisely Miss Dale’s opinion,” observed Emily.

“Ah, my friend Miss Dale! Have you seen her lately?”

“Only this morning; and, moreover, a certain famous periodical had just come to hand, and we found her, as she expressed it, diving for pearls.”

“And we knew quite well whose pearls they must be,” remarked Fanny.

Mr. Surrey smiled but said nothing.

Miss Dale, to whom more than once this evening allusion had been made, was an old friend of Mrs. Gilbert’s and had of late years come to reside near her. She was somewhat of an invalid—somewhat of a recluse—and the solitude in which now she usually lived furnished ample opportunity for the mournful retrospection she was but too prone to indulge in. Her present position afforded a sad and striking contrast to that of her early years, when Mrs. Gilbert had first known her, and when she had seemed surrounded by prosperity.

A variety of untoward and distressing occurrences had conduced to this change; but perhaps the most unfortunate circumstance of her life was an engagement formed in her youth with an officer of the Indian army, at that time at home on leave of absence, and who, notwithstanding his fervent attachment to her, was not in the estimation of her family altogether deserving of the affection she bestowed on him, and their consent to her union with him was therefore long withheld.

This engagement had proved unpropitious—had been productive of much anxiety, and as time went on had subjected her to that sickness of heart almost inseparable from a prolonged betrothal. But the sudden rupture of the bond, owing to the violent death, through a terrible accident, of the object of her attachment, and immediately following her brief interview with him on his arrival in England, whither he had at length returned for the express purpose of claiming the fulfilment of her engagement, caused a shock that well nigh brought her

to the grave. It was long before she recovered from this fearful blow, but by degrees the agony of it subsided, and finally was so far conquered by the efforts of her reason, that a chastened sorrow was all that remained.

Her friends began to hope that she might be induced to receive favourably the addresses of a former suitor, who at this time once more made proposals of marriage to her, but though conscious of his worth, and grateful for his constancy, she declined his offer; and soon after, going into retirement, it appeared that she purposed leading a life of solitude.

Mr. Surrey's acquaintance with Miss Dale was now of some years standing, although it had not commenced till the most eventful period of her life had passed, and indeed he was but partly cognizant of her earlier history. It was, however, obvious to him that she had endured a great sorrow, and she awakened in his feelings a warm and sympathetic interest. He was ever pleased to find himself in her vicinity, and at the mention of her name this evening, he involuntarily

fell into thought concerning her. But Mrs. Gilbert presently broke in upon his reverie, with an observation apart from the subject of it, "You still live among books, William?" she said, enquiringly.

Rousing himself from his unsocial meditation, after a momentary pause, he answered, "I have few other companions; but lately I have been wandering among mountains and lakes."

"You have not lost your love for the study of nature?"

"Must one not, day by day, become more enamoured of such a study?"

"Yes, with a mind free from care, and with time at one's own disposal."

"Poor mamma seldom allows herself time for even a country walk; she is too busy at home," said Emily.

"My dear, home is my best place."

"And how are Edmund and Andrew?" enquired Mr. Surrey, presently.

"Edmund is not here now," and after a moment's pause, Mrs. Gilbert added, "I must

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"Edmund is not here now," and after a moment's pause, Mrs. Gilbert added, "I must

caution you not to mention his name to his father, it will only distress him," and this caution was hardly given when Mr. Gilbert made his appearance, Rhoda dancing before him, and accompanied by his son Andrew.

"I am rejoiced to find you here," he cried, giving Mr. Surrey a hearty shake of the hand, "we had almost despaired of ever seeing you again, it is so long since you have vouchsafed us a visit."

"It is four whole years," exclaimed Rhoda.

"Well you must make up for this long absence by giving us as much time as you can possibly spare now."

"I am going to enjoy a week among you, if you don't get tired of me before hand."

"A week! pooh! pooh! We are not going to let you off so easily as that, are we, my dear wife?"

"I fear we shall have to deal with an obstinate man, but we must try what our powers of persuasion can effect."

"Well, I am sorry that I cannot stay to add

mine to them, but I really have some business in hand that I must get through to night; and here is Andrew just come to say, 'how d'ye do,' and no more, for we are both hard at work. I know you will excuse us, Surrey; Mrs. Gilbert and the girls will do their best to make you comfortable."

And so saying, Mr. Gilbert and his son hurried out of the room.

"You find my husband much altered," observed Mrs. Gilbert sadly.

"He is not looking well certainly," and as he drew his chair nearer to the fire and to Mrs. Gilbert, she gave him, in a low voice, an outline of the anxieties that were pressing on the family, and of the plan that she had been discussing with the girls previous to his arrival, and this catching Fanny's ear, she said abruptly,—

"Emily has been imaginative enough to suppose that Miss Dale would like to come and live with us. What do you think of it, Mr. Surrey?"

"I suspect she would prefer the greater freedom and tranquillity of a house of her own to a resi-

dence with any of her friends, however highly she might value them. But really I can scarcely presume to offer an opinion on the subject."

"Oh! but you know so well all her likings and dislikings; you are such friends."

"I have not seen Miss Dale for a long while."

"She is painting such a charming picture now," said Emily.

"What is the subject?" enquired Mr. Surrey.

"Only a little bit of common landscape, which would be nothing at all but for the indescribable charm which she contrives to throw into it. I never can understand how she manages to make the most ordinary scenes appear interesting."

"She has been selling some of her pictures lately," said Fanny.

"My dear, I think we are hardly at liberty to speak of this, although Miss Dale made no secret of it to us," observed Mrs. Gilbert; "but since you have mentioned it, it is but right to explain that through a kind but injudicious act of hers, her little property has become so reduced that she is forced to turn her talent for painting to

profitable account, and through the medium of a friend in London her pictures are, from time to time, quietly and advantageously disposed of."

"My dear mamma," cried Emily, "I feel persuaded we are only telling Mr. Surrey what he knew long before we did.—Ah! I see by that smile of his that it is so."

"I have certainly heard something of this before," he admitted.

"I was sure of it."

"And in my opinion," he resumed, "as to this painting scheme of hers she has not health for it."

"She is looking well just now," remarked Emily, "but she was very ill a few months ago."

"And that was owing to her remaining out too late one evening for the sake of finishing a sketch," said Mrs. Gilbert. "Doctor Bassett was then very doubtful of her recovery; and he now insists that extreme care is necessary in order to guard against the recurrence of such an illness."

"Doctor Bassett is a favourite friend of hers, is he not?" asked Mr. Surrey.

"She has found him essentially kind and I believe she is amused by the cleverness of his conversation, although thinking differently from him on most subjects," answered Mrs. Gilbert.

"Doctor Bassett has, or pretends to have, such a thorough contempt for woman's understanding," said Fanny.

"He is quite in the wrong there," observed Mr. Surrey.

"I am glad to hear you say so; you must have an argument together on this subject, I am persuaded you will have the best of it," cried Emily.

"I invariably endeavour to avoid argument."

"Well, I think a good spirited argument is the most amusing thing in the world."

"Ladies enjoy that sort of thing, I know."

"I declare that is just such a speech as Doctor Bassett himself would have made."

"I tell you what sort of speech I must be making now, I must be saying good night! It is getting quite late."

"You ought not to be going away at all,"

said Mrs. Gilbert, "but a wilful man, you know—I leave you to finish the sentence. However you will come to us early to-morrow."

"Yes, bag and baggage, I will be with you before your dinner hour."

"Oh, come to breakfast," cried Emily.

"No, no, thank you, and once more good night."

CHAPTER II.

THE sun was shining cheerfully, and the last night's frost lay glittering on the ground, when on the following day Mr. Surrey set forward at a somewhat rapid pace on his early morning walk. He was soon at some little distance from the town of Woodridge, where he had spent the preceding night, and passing across a portion of waste land, or common, was fully enjoying the influence of an invigorating wintry breeze, robbed of its rudest chill by the free rays of an unclouded sky.

The landscape which stretched around seemed not wanting in interest to him, although the casual observer might have found in it little

worthy of notice, and he not unfrequently stayed his rapid steps and stood gazing intently at some one point of view : now, perhaps, it was the little cluster of cottages seen in the distance, with the blue smoke curling above them—now it was a group of cattle in an adjoining field carefully seeking their scanty food—and now it was the far away high road winding over a hilly part of the country, with the waggener and his team slowly passing along. Or his attention was caught by some objects nearer at hand ; there were icicles sparkling on the rugged bush, or the sunshine was falling on a patch of green sod that lay beside a frozen pool, or a shy bird was on the path and fluttered timidly at his approach. He felt no want of companionship on his solitary ramble ; ordinary as the scene around him was, it supplied him with ample food for reflection, and thus occupied, two or three hours passed swiftly away. At the end of this time, however, looking at his watch, he determined to proceed no further, and taking a short cut across the common, whose limits he had been traversing in

various directions, he soon found himself on the highway leading immediately back to Woodridge; here for a moment he paused, and then retraced his steps till he arrived at a portion of the road whence a narrower way diverged, and this way he took. It was a long and sheltered lane, sheltered even at this leafless season by the thick and high hedge with which on each side it was walled. Quickly traversing this quiet path, and emerging from it, he came suddenly on a pleasant suburb of the town, where were many modest-looking mansions, each one of them standing detached from the other, and surrounded with its own little portion of ornamental garden.

The wicket-gate of one of these gardens he now entered, and the next moment he was enquiring of the pretty maid-servant, who had answered his summons at the house-door, whether her mistress were at home; and being answered in the affirmative, he quickly stepped forward, as she threw open the door of a simply-furnished room, where sat a lady bending over her easel. The sound of his entrance dis-

turbed her, she looked up, and colouring deeply, rose hastily, and advanced towards him with an extended hand—"Is it possible? I thought you were hundreds of miles distant!"

"We meet again you see, in spite of the forebodings."

"Ah, there was a cloud passing then!"

"But how well you are looking now!"

"I am well, quite well at present."

And they sat down and fell into quiet talk.

"And you intend remaining here only a week," said Miss Dale, after Mr. Surrey had told her of his purposed visit to the Gilberts; "that is almost as bad as not coming at all."

"Oh, in that time we shall contrive to have much talk together: we shall take pleasant walks as of old. I was half inclined to ask you to accompany me this morning, but suspected I should be too early for you."

"I wish you had done so: I have wasted this beautiful morning."

"Not wasted it surely," said Mr. Surrey, glanc-

ing towards the easel. "Come, let me see what you have in hand."

She shewed him an unfinished sketch. "You cannot judge of it in its present state."

"Indeed, I can perceive that it is of high promise; that tree is beautifully sketched, and the cattle quietly grazing, seem to me perfect: you have already succeeded in throwing into the landscape an air of repose that is very effective."

"You are kindly trying to give me encouragement."

"No, indeed, and any encouragement I could give would be of little worth; but I am unfeignedly glad to hear that you have met with encouragement, and of the right sort."

"I assure you this little success is a surprise to myself; I feel that my poor efforts have been rewarded with more indulgence than they deserve; but it is a happy circumstance for me, as you, who know pretty well the state of my finances, can easily imagine."

"But I must be permitted to repeat the cau-

tion which I have already given. It will be the height of imprudence to rely solely on so precarious a mode of support, especially with your uncertain state of health."

"There is no help for it; I have no other resource."

"You have relatives, affluent relatives."

"Yes, and I have also an antipathy to a state of dependence."

"Yet, a home you must have."

"Do you not find me in one? You will say it is built on the sand, for this is its only foundation," said she, faintly smiling, and laying her hand on the easel.

"Ah!" sighed Mr. Surrey, "you are impracticable,—impracticable as I have ever found you."

"Say not so; your counsel has been invaluable to me."

"Has it ever been followed?"

"Often: although at the moment it was offered it might seem to have been rejected."

"I claim no right to dictate, but I would gladly sometimes advise."

"And for this I thank you heartily. But now tell me something of yourself. I need not ask what was your last month's occupation, since it lies confessed before me," said Miss Dale, glancing at a periodical which lay on the table, "but what have you now in hand?"

"Nothing but thought."

"Thought which will take form, I hope. Your creations are to my mind full of grandeur and beauty, but they are tinged with a mournfulness which it saddens one to contemplate."

"Have they indeed this effect?"

"Yes; they are so essentially a part of yourself."

"And this you deprecate?"

"On the contrary, it makes them of infinitely higher interest."

"Not to the general reader, I suspect."

"Perhaps not; but you do not aim at being a popular writer."

"If I did so my failure is signal."

"Ah!" cried Miss Dale, "what author of genius would not rather be appreciated by the few than applauded by the many?"

"Even a poor author?"

"Yes, even a poor author; and you know it."

"Well," answered Mr. Surrey, "be it so. But now we must have a little more talk about painting. Are all your sketches from nature?"

"All of them. I have no good pictures to copy, but I sometimes paint a scene from memory."

"Do you not find difficulty in this?"

"Yes, but it is difficulty of an interesting sort; each tint of the landscape calls up some feeling of the past."

"This may be far from pleasurable."

"True, it is an occupation that partakes more of pain than of pleasure, but it is not the less interesting on that account."

"You had far better not indulge in it; take the commonest scene that lies before you rather than this."

"When the spring comes and I can go out to sketch I shall follow your good advice."

"And meanwhile you will be enervating your mind and injuring your health by giving way

to mournful retrospection; and I shall hear again of clouds, and shadows, and dismal forebodings ”

“ Ah! do not be severe upon me!” cried Miss Dale, and tears rose to her eyes.

“ That I can never intentionally be. But come,” added Mr. Surrey, cheerfully, “ you must not altogether lose this fine day; there will be an hour’s sunshine yet. Let us have a walk!”

“ It is too late, and you have had a long walk already.”

“ Not at all too late; and I am quite ready for another walk.”

“ Well, it does look tempting out of doors; I will go with you, and be ready in five minutes.”

“ And during those five minutes I shall amuse myself with looking at some of the drawings that I see scattered about here, or, with your permission, I shall open this portfolio.”

“ Anything you like,” said Miss Dale, as she left the room.”

“ Ah!” thought Mr. Surrey, as he turned over sketch after sketch, “ memory has been

too busy here; there is a healthful tone wanting, the dead leaves of autumn are too abundantly scattered. Pity that a shadow of the past should thus mar the most promising of her efforts!" He put aside the portfolio and took from his pocket a small packet of books, which he had just placed on the table, when Miss Dale, equipped for her walk, re-entered the room. Presently they were pacing to and fro in the sheltered lane.

"I shall not take you beyond this to-day, for it is getting cold, but to-morrow we will start early and enjoy the morning sun and look at some of our favourite views," said Mr. Sarrey.

"There are delightful walks hereabout. I shall be able to introduce you to some new ones, for I have explored a good deal since you were last here."

"You ought not to have remained here; you should have travelled; you should have gone to Switzerland; what sketches you would have produced then!"

"No, my pencil is only adapted for this quiet

scenery; it would utterly fail in any attempt to pourtray the grand or the sublime."

"You have yet scarcely essayed its power."

"It is little enough certainly that I have done, but I think I have pretty accurately measured the extent of its capability; it will not reach beyond the tame landscape."

"As you proceed in your art you will find its power increase, and you will then have resolution for higher efforts."

"There is not time enough before me to gain the excellence which would be requisite for more aspiring attempts."

"That is a very convenient excuse, but it will not do for you; there is ample time."

"Not with more than half a life exhausted, and with my sad desultory and idle habits, by which I lose the greater part of the day in useless pursuits, or in mere fruitless reverie. I have not energy enough for severe application."

"Now, I could lecture you very seriously on this subject, but I believe that you have some apology for it in your frail health, so you must

work only moderately, and give yourself as much relaxation as you can afford. Do you ever venture out in the evening? Shall I meet you sometimes at the Gilberts?"

"I am often with them, but we generally meet in the morning; the girls frequently call on me in their early walk, and I seldom go into the town without having half-an-hour's chat with Mrs. Gilbert, but I have not seen Mr. Gilbert for this long while; poor man! he has had, as you doubtless know, a great deal of anxiety and distress lately."

"Yes, I have been much concerned to hear it, and I was sorry to observe the alteration in my cousin's appearance; she looks care-worn and troubled."

"You must, indeed, be struck by the change; she who used to have such a remarkably cheerful happy countenance!"

"Ah," said Mr. Surrey, "Margaret had much better have remained as she was. I always thought her marriage an ill-advised one, not as far as Mr. Gilbert himself is concerned, for he is

an excellent man, but on account of his straightened circumstances."

"I had imagined that it was only lately he had had pecuniary difficulties to struggle with."

"I believe they have been very much increased of late, but even at the time of his marriage his affairs were by no means in a prosperous condition, as he very candidly acknowledged."

"For himself and his children, Mr. Gilbert's union with your cousin must have proved the happiest event possible."

"There can be no doubt of it."

"Then rely on it, whatever her sacrifice may have been, she has not regretted her marriage."

"Possibly not; she is a most amiable creature," said Mr. Surrey.

"And she has one great source of happiness, not only Mr. Gilbert, but his children are most affectionately attached to her."

"It would be strange if they were not, since her whole aim has been to conduce to their comfort and well-being."

“And in this respect,” observed Miss Dale, “they are more fortunate than if their own mother had lived. She, poor thing! in spite of possessing many good qualities, was peevish and irritable; very ill-adapted to meet adversity in any shape; but then, you know, she had been an indulged beauty, and her suffering state of health also might have affected her temper.”

“Does not Fanny resemble her mother?”

“Strikingly, I think, in every respect; but she has not quite her mother’s share of beauty; and she has better health, and consequently, perhaps a somewhat better temper.”

“She has always appeared to me the least amiable of the family,” said Mr. Surrey.

“That she undoubtedly is. Emily is a fine hearted girl, and Rhoda is charming. As for the boys, Andrew bids fair to resemble his father in disposition, and poor Edmund’s worst fault has been thoughtless extravagance.”

“Which, however, was inexcusable,” returned Mr. Surrey, “as he must have been fully aware of the state of his father’s circumstances.”

“His conduct cannot be justified, but he is so young, and of a nature so open to temptation where anything like amusement comes in the way, that I think it may be pardoned,” replied Miss Dale.

“His sister Emily appears to be very warmly attached to him.”

“Her affection for him is unbounded: she would, I am certain, make any sacrifice, if by doing so she could in the least degree contribute to his welfare.”

“Ah, she is a fine, generous creature.”

“She has a fine countenance, too, don’t you think?” asked Miss Dale.

“The expression is good, frank, and animated.”

“And you surely consider her handsome?”

“No; but her figure is fine.”

“I assure you she is very generally admired; indeed here she is reckoned a beauty.”

“Very likely, but she does not strike me as such, nor is she as handsome as she was when I was here four years ago; she was but nineteen then.”

"I remember thinking at that time you were more than half captivated by her."

"You were mistaken, entirely mistaken. But it is getting too cold for you now. I shall take you home."

"No, I shall remain out another half-hour, but it is time for you to be going if you would not keep the Gilbert's dinner waiting; they keep old-fashioned early hours."

"True, I ought to have remembered this, but I shall be in good time yet; and as I pass your door on my way, I shall insist on seeing you safe within it. I shall not allow you to be so imprudent as to remain out another half-hour for the mere sake of taking cold and being laid up, perhaps for the next six months. I verily believe you take all possible pains to injure your health, and you really do deserve a most severe scolding."

"I think, indeed, you have given me one, and that I have borne it with exemplary patience."

"Well, we will have no more talking at present; we will close our lips to keep out the frosty air."

And they soon reached Miss Dale's door.

"Now go in," said Mr. Surrey, as they shook hands, "go in and sit by a cheerful fire, but don't sit down to paint from memory and fall into a fit of blue vapours. I left a little parcel of books on your table, I think some of them will interest you; you shall tell me to-morrow what you think of the 'House of the Seven Gables,' and now good bye.

"How kind you are! Good bye."

Miss Dale did not slight Mr. Surrey's advice; she presently seated herself before her cheerful fire, and opened the precious packet of books, as she took from it volume after volume,—“how cheering,” she thought, “is the conviction of being really cared for by a friend. How pleasant is it to obey the directions of so kind a monitor!” And then she fell into a reverie in which memory brought before her, as in a dream, days long passed away—when her little fortune was not diminished—when there existed no necessity for the exertion of her talent, and she had cultivated it for mere pleasure. Then passed before

her the first meeting with Surrey—how full of sorrow her heart had then been, and how the interest of his conversation had gradually drawn her from the weakness of indulging in unavailing regret—how almost imperceptibly she had grown to value his society, till at length it had become her highest pleasure; and now how delightful was his return!—Time had not yet robbed her of all enjoyment.

CHAPTER III.

“You are but just in time, we were going to sit down to dinner without you, for we are obliged to be punctual on papa’s account,” said Emily Gilbert, meeting Mr. Surrey in the hall just as he had entered the house, and leading the way into the dining-room, where the rest of the party were already assembled, “You are but just in time, where have you been all day?”

“No catechizing,” said Mr. Gilbert, “we are very glad to see Mr. Surrey now.”

“I beg ten thousand pardons. I have been taking a long country ramble, and the time slipped away unaccountably.”

“Rhoda and I have had a long walk also,”

said Fanny, "and on our return we called at Miss Dale's, but she was out."

"What an improvement there is in the old road leading to the common; it is positively passable now," said Mr. Surrey.

"Oh you were there!" exclaimed Emily. "To be sure we might have remembered your favourite old haunt, and the long solitary hours you used to spend there, and might have guessed how you were disposing of yourself."

"But perhaps they were not *solitary* hours to-day," observed Fanny emphatically.

Mr. Surrey was silent.

"There was a gipsy camp on the common a little while ago," said Rhoda, "and then Miss Dale used to go there and sketch them."

"Oh! Mr. Surrey," cried Emily, "you must see some of Miss Dale's beautiful landscapes; you would be quite charmed with them."

"Of course he has seen them already," remarked Fanny in a low tone.

"She paints in water-colours, and this is in good taste in my opinion. I cannot admire the

occupation of oil-painting for a lady," said Mr. Surrey.

"Doctor Bassett despises painting altogether," said Fanny, "he was talking of it the other day, and he insisted that it is a useless art."

"I am inclined to believe that your Doctor Bassett professes some most extraordinary opinions for the sake of singularity."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Emily, "he is far too honest for that; but he has some eccentric notions, yet he is very amusing, and very interesting, too, for he is excessively clever. But somehow or other I feel persuaded that you would not get on well together—that you would not like each other in fact."

"I presume that we are not likely to come into collision."

"Indeed you will be almost sure to meet him here; he very often looks in."

"Well, if we do meet we must have recourse to the never failing English topic, the state of the weather, and on this subject I presume we might contrive to be of the same opinion."

"I would not answer for it," said Emily.

"The doctor is a prime favourite with my daughters, though he does lecture them pretty sharply occasionally," said Mr. Gilbert.

"I really believe they like him the better for it," remarked his wife.

"To be sure we do! at least I am quite sure that *I* do," cried Emily.

"Ah!" said Andrew, "that is why he does it."

"Upon my word, I think I must take a leaf out of Doctor Bassett's book," observed Mr. Surrey.

"By-the-bye, I think you would have made an excellent physician," said Emily.

"No doubt I should, since such is your opinion; but unluckily I must be content, instead, with being a briefless barrister," said Surrey, who long ago had deserted law for literature.

"Ah! you poets, and play-wrights, and metaphysicians, and moral philosophers will never get on in this work-a-day world of ours!" exclaimed Mr. Gilbert.

"Perhaps that is not precisely our object," rejoined Surrey.

"And perhaps though you don't get on yourselves, you help to make the world get on," said Emily.

"We do our little stroke of work and there-with rest content."

"And I am sure we should be but a set of savages without you."

"You have a warm advocate in my daughter Emily, you see," said Mr. Gilbert. "If you were a thriving young lawyer now, ten to one but the young lady would have a sharp word for you."

"Ah, indeed! we have our compensations now and then."

"I wish I were an author! I wish I could write a romance!" exclaimed Emily.

"You had better by half live one," rejoined Mr. Surrey.

"What, be the actual heroine of one myself! There is no field for it here."

"Everywhere that which would be romance on the page is continually taking place."

Here the conversation was interrupted. A roll of music was brought in with a message from Miss Harris.

"I am glad to hear of music," said Mr. Surrey, "I shall petition for some this evening."

"Fanny plays very nicely indeed," said Emily, "and Rhoda, for her age is quite an accomplished musician."

"And Emily, I suspect, is still incorrigible, and will have nothing to do with music."

"I have no talent for it."

"I am afraid that is an excuse for a little idleness."

"There is no need for all the world to be musical," observed Mr. Gilbert, "two out of my three girls are quite enough I think."

"Ah! it is the indulgent Papa who encourages the idleness, I suspect," said Surrey, as on Mrs. Gilbert's rising from the table he opened the door for her and the girls to pass out.

"Mamma," exclaimed Emily, as soon as they were in the drawing-room, "how very agreeable Mr. Surrey is. How I do wish he always lived here."

“He would never be stationary anywhere, my dear, so we must be content with a visit from him now and then.”

“What a strange thing it is that he has never married. Don’t you think so, mamma?”

“I hardly know that I do, my love; and perhaps it is as well as it is. He is, I suspect, too fastidious and too sensitive to be likely to find happiness in the ordinary lot of marriage.”

“But do you think he has never wished to marry?”

“That is quite another affair, my dear; but I do not believe he will ever marry now.”

“I am certain he has been to see Miss Dale to-day,” exclaimed Fanny, interrupting her practice of the new duet.

“Very likely, my dear; there is no reason why he should not have paid a visit to a friend.”

“Ah!” persisted Fanny, “I was very young when Mr. Surrey was last here, but I had my eyes about me, and I used to see how Miss Dale brightened up whenever he talked to her.”

"I dare say she did, because his conversation is precisely of a kind to interest her."

"Miss Dale must be older than Mr. Surrey," said Fanny; "she looks quite wan and worn sometimes."

"But only sometimes," observed Emily.

"And sorrow and thought, no less than time, have done this mischief," said Mrs. Gilbert.

"To my mind," exclaimed Emily, "her countenance is very attractive; it has such variety of expression, and you can read something of her past history in it, I suspect."

"What odd notions you do take up, Emily," cried Fanny; "and after all, I dare say Miss Dale's history has nothing very remarkable in it."

"Ah! my dear, if you were acquainted with it you would not say so," observed Mrs. Gilbert; "hers has been a painfully eventful life, and it is surprising that she looks as well as she does, and that she can be as cheerful as she occasionally is."

"And really she is so droll and entertaining

sometimes," said Emily; "I declare no one can make me laugh as she does."

"She tells me such amusing stories," cried Rhoda.

"What are they about?" asked Fanny.

"Oh! it would take a long time to tell what they are about, but they are something like the stories in the beautiful book that Mr. Surrey gave me, something like the 'Ugly Duckling.'"

"If she can tell stories like that she must be very clever indeed," cried Emily.

"Oh! yes, of course she is clever," rejoined Fanny, "and I like her very much, as well as you do, I dare say, only I can't bear your way of crying people up to the skies."

"Emily is something of an enthusiast, it must be confessed," remarked Mrs. Gilbert.

"I guessed as much," said Mr. Surrey, who had at that moment unobserved quietly entered the room, "I guessed as much, and what subject for her enthusiasm has she just now?"

"We were talking of dear Miss Dale."

He smiled, "Shall we go to-morrow morning,

Rhoda, and call on Miss Dale?" he said presently.

"Oh, yes, and we will walk all over the common," she cried, dancing across the room.

"What a lively little fairy you are!" exclaimed Mr. Surrey, seizing her as she was flitting along. "Come and sit down quietly here," and he made room for her beside him on the sofa. "Come and sit down here, and tell me what you have been doing all these years that you have contrived to grow so very little."

"I have been waiting to grow, like the 'Ugly Duckling,'" answered Rhoda, alluding to Christian Anderson's story, Mr. Surrey's gift."

"And shall you one day grow into a swan?"

"I am afraid not.

"But I do think you will."

"Let us have some music," cried Mr. Gilbert, who with Andrew, just then entered, "I have not had any from my little Rhoda for this many a day."

"Oh, papa, that has only been because you have had no time to listen," she answered,

quickly seating herself at the piano, and playing with considerable taste a favorite air of her father's.

"The swan is not far off, I suspect," said Mr. Surrey, bending over her, and whispering into her ear as she played the concluding notes.

Rhoda smiled.

"Well, what do you think of my little girl's performance? Is it tolerable?" asked Mr. Gilbert."

"Excellent! She does credit to her master."

"All the instruction she has had she owes to the kindness of her sister Fanny," said Mrs. Gilbert.

"Indeed! then Fanny must herself be an able musician."

"Fanny, my love, let Mr. Surrey have a specimen of your talent," said Mr. Gilbert.

"Pray indulge me!" entreated Mr. Surrey.

But Fanny hesitated.

"Oh, my poor play will be nothing to you, who are accustomed to hear first-rate performances."

"I daresay I am not accustomed to hear finer performances than yours."

"Come, come, Fan, don't stand there to be complimented beforehand," cried Mr. Gilbert impatiently. "Begin at once, my dear, or Andrew and I shall lose the pleasure of hearing you, for we must be off in a few minutes. Afterwards Mr. Surrey may flatter you to your heart's content."

"I don't want to be flattered," said Fanny moodily.

"And I had really no intention of bestowing anything so worthless as flattery upon you," said Mr. Surrey, smiling good-naturedly.

Fanny turned from the piano, and approaching the work-table took up a half-finished purse which lay on it—

"My love," cried Mrs. Gilbert, "do oblige your papa at once."

But Fanny was counting the stitches on her netting-pin and did not seem to hear the request.

"I see how it is: come along, Andrew," said

Mr. Gilbert, and they quitted the room together.

Mrs. Gilbert sat vexed and silent. The color mounted to Emily's cheeks, "Poor dear papa!" said she, "we shall not see him again all the evening."

"Rhoda, darling," presently said Mrs Gilbert, "let us have a little more music, as Mr. Surrey is fond of it."

"Oh, mamma, he would so much better like to hear Fanny play."

But Mr. Surrey continued silent.

"Will you like a game of chess?" asked Emily, turning to him; "I have not quite forgotten your old lessons," and Surrey acquiescing they sat down to play.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, when the game had somewhat advanced, "you have become an adept since you were my pupil; you must have had considerable practice."

"I have had none lately," replied Emily, keeping her eyes fixed on the board."

"Do your sisters play?"

"No, neither of them."

"Now, confess at once," said Mr. Surrey, after a little while, when his king was in check, "confess at once that you have been studying under a professor of the game. Positively I have no chance with you."

He looked up as he spoke; there was a vivid blush on her cheek.

"Indeed, I have only played with a learner like myself."

"Mr. Randall used to say that Emily played better than he did," said Rhoda, who was now looking on the board.

"Mr. Randall! Is that the old clergyman whom I used sometimes to see here?"

"Oh no! it is his son, Charles Randall, who is a sailor."

"A lieutenant on board the 'Vigilant,' a very promising young officer, as we are told, and an excellent young man," added Mrs. Gilbert.

Emily made a false move.

"Ah, the game is mine after all!" exclaimed

Mr. Surrey, "but it is hardly fair to take advantage of such an oversight: we had no right to be talking; it disturbed you."

"Indeed, I must have lost," said Emily, rising quickly, "you are the better player."

"I hear papa's bell ring," exclaimed Rhoda, and a moment afterwards Janet came in to say that her master wished to have a cup of strong coffee.

"Ah, then he has that terrible headache again," cried Mrs. Gilbert.

"Let me take the coffee to him, mama," said Rhoda.

"Stay a moment, Rhoda," cried Fanny, following her to the door, and whispering a few words to her there.

"Oh, yes, he will be so pleased," exclaimed Rhoda aloud, as she ran lightly down-stairs.

Fanny returned to the table and took up a piece of ordinary work—the purse had disappeared. Presently Mr. Gilbert, with Rhoda, made his appearance. "Here I come with my

little cup-bearer, you see," said he; "I thought the coffee would do me more good by half in this cheerful room than in my dismal office. Can you find a place for me and my cup?" and he seated himself by Fanny. "Do you know that I have had a beautiful present this evening, and the very thing of all others that I wanted—my pretty Fanny's handiwork," he added, kissing her cheek, down which a tear was silently stealing, and then displaying a silken purse with glittering rings and tassels.

"This really is a present worth having," said Mr. Surrey, taking it up to examine it more closely, and turning to Fanny with a smile, "what an accomplished worker you are!"

"Everything that Fanny undertakes she does well," said Emily, with affectionate earnestness.

"I declare my wretched headache is already more than half cured," exclaimed Mr. Gilbert, cheerfully sipping his coffee.

"Do you think you could bear a little music now?" enquired Fanny in a low voice.

"My dear love, that would complete the cure."

“Is not such music as this, Surrey,” said Mr. Gilbert, as Fanny concluded an exquisitely plaintive air, “is not such music as this enough to charm away the headache?”

“Aye, indeed, or the heartache!”

CHAPTER IV.

“You are pretty well wrapped up with all those shawls and furs about you, certainly,” observed Mr. Surrey, as he was one evening escorting Miss Dale home, after a visit she had paid to the Gilberts, “but still with your extreme delicacy of health, you incur some risk I fear, by inhaling this frosty night air. I should advise you not very often to repeat the experiment of evening visiting at this season.”

“I frequently notice,” said Miss Dale, “that you seem to imagine my occasional ailments proceed always from some neglect of needful caution on my part; I can assure you, however, they are far oftener the result of a totally different cause.”

“Then shun that other cause, whatever it be.”

“Would I not gladly do so! But disquietude of mind is not always to be kept at bay.”

“Have we not sometimes held philosophical discussions on this very subject?”

“Yes, and you have made me not unfrequently acknowledge the wisdom of your calm view of life.”

“And why cannot you in the like manner regard it.”

“I offer no defence for my weakness.”

“And thus you would disarm censure; but I cannot let you off so easily; and first I must hear your excuse for the disquietude you speak of.”

“Memory may furnish it; in part at least.”

“No; from a review of the past, you should gather strength, not stoop to feebleness; you must put forward some other plea.”

“I might urge that I have not yet learned stoicism.”

“And I would enjoin you to restrain your sympathies; and to take patiently your own measure of suffering; in quiet submission to the inevitable, assuredly there lies true wisdom.”

“Ah! could we but know—” she stopped.

“Go on,” said Mr. Surrey, “I am aware of your proneness to speculative thought and I suspect that we are only now approaching the true ground of the disquietude.”

“I confess it.”

“You need say no more; and you have my fullest sympathy.”

There was a lengthened pause; the silence was broken by Surrey.

“But this grave meditation of ours is not a very appropriate termination of the cheerful evening we have had,” said he; “and, by the way, I must not withhold a word of praise which it seems to me you deserve; you are always animated in society, always ready to contribute your share towards the amusement of the passing hour.”

“I deserve no commendation for this, it costs

me no effort; I find little difficulty in being gay with the gay."

"Then you should go more frequently into society; I shall prescribe this sort of dissipation to you as a mental tonic—an exhilarating medicine."

"I scarcely need it; I can be cheerful in solitude; wandering about the lanes and fields here, or sitting at home at work on a favourite picture, I sometimes feel perfectly happy. The truth is I am innately of a glad temperament; the sun, you know, will now and then shine out between the clouds."

"Except when some opaque object intervenes—it is my dull presence then which causes the eclipse."

"No, indeed, no; but my sense of your indulgence betrays me into making confession to you of my miserable weaknesses."

"Confession is suggestive of penance," observed Surrey, "which shall forthwith be imposed: there must be no trimming the midnight lamp: and no invitation to speculative thought;

the couch must be sought at once, and a welcome prepared for placid sleep. Good night."

And shaking hands they parted at the little wicket of Miss Dale's garden.

"We hardly expected you to return so soon," said Emily, as half-an-hour afterwards Mr. Surrey re-entered the drawing-room; "we thought you would have remained for a little chat with Miss Dale after taking her home."

"It is not such an easy matter to get rid of me, you see; and I have made haste back in order to enjoy a little music; and now I am rewarded for my impatience by finding the piano closed and Fanny's work-box displayed."

"It is a little too late for more music to-night," said Mr. Gilbert; "but, come, Surrey, take a glass of wine and a biscuit after your walk."

"No wine, but a biscuit and a glass of water, if you please."

"Nay, you must take a glass of wine if only to drink Miss Dale's good health. How well she was looking this evening!"

“So well, that to be the medium of any good wish which may be suggested for improvement in her health, this pure element is sufficiently potent,” said Mr. Surrey, pouring out for himself a glass of water.

“You have always a very ingenious method of contriving to take your own way, Mr. Surrey, I observe,” said Emily; “you cannot think how much it amuses me to detect this in a hundred little instances.”

“I must be more careful in future: I was not aware of being in the presence of so keen a censor.”

“Indeed I do not presume to be a censor at all; and, moreover, I perceive almost invariably that your way is the right way.”

“Don’t let my girl make you vain, Surrey!” exclaimed Mr. Gilbert.

“There is little danger of it while she is so poor an adept in the art of flattery; she must first learn to administer it without the alloy of previous reproof.”

“I seem to have involved myself in a sad

scrape," said Emily, "but really I had not the slightest intention of saying anything ill-natured."

"From those smiling lips it were hard to extract any very great bitterness," said Mr. Surrey.

"Miss Dale says," cried little Rhoda, "that Emily's temper resembles the rose; it is very sweet, and the thorns about it are only for self-defence; they never prick but for being too rudely handled."

"Miss Dale herself has not the most perfect temper in the world, I should imagine," observed Fanny.

"Oh, Fanny! what possible reason can you have for thinking so?" exclaimed Emily.

"I only judge from her countenance. She has very often a frown," persisted Fanny.

"Ah! but that frown has nothing to do with temper; it is merely the result of thought, I fancy: am I not right, Mr. Surrey?"

"I have no doubt of your power of penetration."

"But what is your own opinion? Do you think Miss Dale has a perfect temper?" asked Fanny.

"I know nothing to the contrary; but I confess I am not in the habit of playing the critic with my friends."

"I wish we had all known Miss Dale as mamma knew her, when she was in her gay prime," cried Emily.

"But even then she had her moods of thoughtfulness, and occasionally that same bending of the brow which has now deepened into the frown of which your sister complains," said Mrs. Gilbert.

"She could not have been so lovely as Emily is so fond of imagining she was," said Fanny.

"At all events, loveable she must always be," returned her sister.

Fanny's lip curled derisively.

"Yes, and fascinating also," persisted Emily. "Am I not right?" she added, appealing earnestly to Mr. Surrey.

"I have not the slightest inclination to differ from you: if you say you are fascinated, I am quite ready to believe it."

"That is quite another affair," said Fanny, "that is not at all allowing that Miss Dale herself is a fascinating person."

“Nay, if she fascinates, must not she be fascinating?”

“Aye, aye, look to your logic, young lady!” cried Mr. Gilbert, good-humouredly.

“I know nothing about logic.”

“Dr. Bassett says that ladies never do arrive at logical conclusions,” said Emily, “and by the way, Mr. Surrey, he called here while you were walking home with Miss Dale, and we wanted him very much to stay till you came back, but we could not persuade him: he said you were a lion, and that he always got out of the way of lions when he could.”

“Upon my word very flattering! But I was not aware of being anything so formidable.”

“What a courageous lady Miss Dale must be to trust herself with such an escort,” said Mr. Gilbert.

“Oh! she is another Una,” cried Emily.

“Ah! I perceive it is time to say good night; you are already in the land of dreams,” said Mr. Surrey.

CHAPTER V

ON the welcome appearance of blue sky and sunshine after a day or two of cloud and rain, Mrs. Gilbert was one morning induced by the persuasion of Surrey to accompany him, on his customary country walk. This opportunity for uninterrupted conversation tempting her to the detail of many family circumstances, she was led to recur to the scheme she had suggested to the girls, and that also had been mentioned to Surrey on the evening of his arrival. He said he had thought of it more than once since, and that he could perceive no objection to an endeavour to carry it into effect. "But meanwhile," he added, "what say you to accepting

me on these same terms as your guest for the next few months? I am just now tired of rambling and should be delighted to make one of your family party."

"My dear William," exclaimed Mrs. Gilbert, "I see and appreciate the kindness of your proposal."

"I do assure you I consider it a very valuable privilege to be admitted into an agreeable domestic circle," answered Mr. Surrey. "And now let us consider the affair as settled," added he taking a folded paper from his pocket-book and slipping it into Mrs. Gilbert's hand. "Nay, nay, there is no need to open it now."

"But this lavish liberality distresses me," cried Mrs. Gilbert, glancing at the contents of the paper. "You are not rich; it is I know only through toil of the brain that you enable yourself to be generous."

"Come, come, not a word more on the subject, but to-morrow let us see old Davis again in the office, and then we shall be able to have a little more of Mr. Gilbert's society I hope."

“Ah I fear my husband will hardly be brought to consent to your most kind scheme.”

“Well, if he insists on turning me out of his house, go I must, there is no doubt of it; but I suspect he will hardly be so inhospitable; I leave my cause in your hands at all events; manage it with your usual good tact and I shall be pretty certain of success. A good wife has, and deserves to have, unbounded influence over her husband in all minor matters—and, by the way, how is it that my friend Emily has not yet taken upon herself the dignity of a wife?”

“Where young women are absolutely without fortune positive suitors are rare; but she has not been without admirers, and she would make such an excellent wife that I sincerely hope she will marry at no distant day.”

“And without doubt,” said Mr. Surrey, “she must before now have felt a predilection for one or other of her admirers.”

“A few years ago,” answered Mrs. Gilbert, “I did suspect that Charles Randall had gained an interest in her affections, but I have since

thought that I was mistaken, for I can hardly suppose if that were the case she could be as light-hearted and cheerful as she is during his long absences."

"Well, I certainly have no right, as I can have no motive for playing the inquisitor in this matter," said Mr. Surrey, "she is a charming girl, and if he has won an interest in her feelings I can only say that this young sailor is a very lucky fellow."

"Yet as he has only his pay as lieutenant—"

"Ah! this terrible poverty," interrupted Surrey, "it is continually the bane of our happiness. But here we are in the vicinity of Miss Dale's abode; and pray what may you call this part of the town or suburb?"

"It goes by the name of 'the Briars;' so called long ago, when a thick thorny copse flourished where now these neat mansions with their trim gardens stand."

"Too neat and too trim by half for the somewhat picturesque name they bear; there is little vestige of the briars at present."

“Except in Miss Dale’s little domain, where a few are still permitted to luxuriate; and you perceive her garden is enclosed with an entire hedge of sweet briar.”

“Let us see if this same hedge is putting forth any budding leaves,” said Mr. Surrey, opening the garden wicket.

“It is too early in the season for that.”

“Well, then, let us find out the easel, and see if there be any leaves unfolding on the canvass,” said he, advancing towards the house.

“I guess now why our walk lay in this direction,” smilingly remarked Mrs. Gilbert.

“How long it is since I have heard that pleasant voice here!” cried Miss Dale, opening the door of her painting-room as they entered, and coming forward with an extended hand. “My dear Margaret, I am delighted to see you; and you,” she added, turning to Mr. Surrey, “are to-day doubly welcome for the sake of your companion.”

“But we are interrupting you, I fear,” said Mrs. Gilbert.

"Yes, and I shall be all the better for it. But you will find my uninhabited little drawing room very chilling," said Miss Dale, as her servant threw open the door, "I think you had better come here into my painting room, which, although in a sad litter is at least snug and warm."

"It is worth all the drawing rooms in the world!" cried Mr. Surrey; "and what progress you have made since yesterday!" he added, approaching the easel. "Look here, Margaret; see the sunny ripple on that stream, the gleam of golden light falling on that green tree—one can almost hear the water flowing, the leaves rustling in the fresh spring breeze."

"It is charming, indeed," said Mrs. Gilbert.

"And is not the artist herself looking as bright and as cheerful as her picture?" said Mr. Surrey.

"No, no; it is spring time with the one and autumn with the other," answered Miss Dale.

"But, my dear Louisa, you really are looking remarkably well," said Mrs. Gilbert; "I was

half inclined to lecture Doctor Bassett yesterday when he told me that he had not seen you for a long while, but I rejoice to perceive there was no need for it."

"I have not required to see him on the score of health certainly, but a neighbourly visit from him now and then would, I confess, have been very acceptable. He always says he has not time for anything of the sort, but one would think he must have an hour now and then to spare for his friends, as he has no family ties at home."

"I wish he would marry, but that he never will do," said Mrs. Gilbert.

"No, never; you may be quite sure of it," rejoined her friend, "he persists in asserting that the result of much observation, for which the routine of his profession has afforded him ample opportunity, is a conviction that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the single is far preferable to the married state."

"Such an opinion must be expressed for the mere sake of provoking an argument, I suspect," said Mr. Surrey.

"No, indeed, it is his grave and deliberate opinion."

"And yet he finds favour with his fair patients."

"Yes, certainly, he cannot fail to do so."

"Ah! you ladies in Protestant England, must still have your confessor or director, or something of the sort; and it matters little whether it be the priest or the physician to whom the office is assigned."

"You are severe on us, William," exclaimed Mrs. Gilbert.

"Not at all severe; I would have you follow your own will, and take your own way, in this as in most other matters. So long as I am myself privileged to escape such an onerous appointment, I am perfectly satisfied with your bestowing it on whomsoever you please."

"What a hint you are giving me," said Miss Dale quietly, "I perceive I must not again burthen you with my confidence."

"Oh! we are privileged friends," he answered in the same tone, "there must be no reserve between us; we must go on as of old."

"But according to your plan of yesterday this is your farewell visit," said Miss Dale.

"You who know me for the most uncertain being in the world, as far as my whereabouts is concerned, will not be surprised to hear that the plan of yesterday is not the plan of to-day, and that the farewell visit is, in parliamentary phrase, prorogued to this day six months."

"Indeed! this is pleasant hearing."

"Is it not delightful?" exclaimed Mrs. Gilbert, "and you don't know half his kindness. I must tell you that this change of plan has been prompted by the most generous motive."

"Hush, hush!" cried Mr. Surrey, "there is no generosity in it, but I hope I have persuaded my kind cousin not to turn me out of doors, till the summer sunshine shall bring with it my periodical restlessness."

"It will be very pleasant to keep you amongst us meanwhile," said Miss Dale, "when the time for the singing of birds is come, we shall recognize the signal for your departure."

"You must not drive me away quite so soon;

I must, at least see the sweetbriar hedge in bloom before I go."

He walked to the window as he spoke, and Mrs. Gilbert, fancying he was becoming impatient to conclude his visit, proposed returning home, but Miss Dale, claiming an old promise of her friend's, insisted on detaining her till the following day, and Surrey was allowed to take his departure alone.

It was some time since the friends had had opportunity for indulging in any lengthened conversation, and with little interruption the day passed on with them in a flow of talk abounding in reminiscences of old scenes and old friends, interesting to both; but as twilight began to steal into the apartment, insensibly they touched on topics of too mournful a cast, and at the mention of more than one distant grave there was a pang at the heart of each.

Silence followed for some little time. Presently Miss Dale approached the window, through the growing darkness, looked stedfastly on the horizon, and as suddenly it became illuminated by a gleam

of the evening sky, "How beautifully it is shining on the sea now," she murmured.

The observation was caught by her friend: "My dear Louisa," she cried, "how you love that restless element."

"I do."

"But I doubt very much whether altogether it exercises a salutary influence on you. I remember on your last return from the sea-side both your health and spirits appeared strangely shattered."

"No wonder, Margaret, no wonder! I had experienced a fearful shock then;" and Miss Dale involuntarily shuddered, and notwithstanding the deepening twilight her sudden pallor was perceptible. "You have heard nothing of this before," she continued presently, in answer to her friend's expression of astonishment, "because I had the idea that by speaking of it I should deepen the miserable impression it had left on my mind. I believe, however, that I judged unwisely, for assuredly my recollection of it is as vivid as ever, and I will now give you a

circumstantial account of what did actually befall me. But that I am alive to tell the tale is sufficient in itself to prevent your being able to realize a tithe of the horror through which I passed."

"I am full of painful curiosity, and most eager to hear this history," said Mrs. Gilbert.

"I must relate it in my own way. You must have patience with me."

"I am all ear."

"Listen, then, as if you were a magistrate taking my deposition!"

CHAPTER VI.

“WHEN last I went to the sea-side, on a part of the coast I had never before visited,” said Miss Dale, commencing her recital, “some of my relations accompanied me; and we spent a few weeks there together pleasantly enough. When the time fixed for our departure arrived, I at the last moment decided on postponing mine. The sea air and baths were benefiting my health, and therefore, for the sake of enjoying those advantages a few weeks longer, I allowed my companions to go without me, in spite of their persuasions to the contrary. The lodgings we had been occupying were already promised to another party, consequently I was under the necessity of at

once providing myself with new quarters; but this in a place crowded with visitors already, and with a regatta coming on, I found no easy task. I had been seeking in vain in various directions for the accommodation I required, when a heavy storm of rain drove me for shelter into a draper's shop, and while there I enquired of the person serving in it, if he could direct me to any house where I should be likely to find the sort of apartments I was in search of. He answered that he knew of no vacant lodgings at all. But at this moment a highly respectable looking young woman, who like myself was taking shelter from the rain, and had heard my inquiry, stepped forward, saying that she was certain an aunt of hers could accommodate me as I wished, and offered to conduct me to her house. On the cessation of the storm, I gladly availed myself of the young person's proposal, and considered myself fortunate on finding the information she had given me correct, and that I could at once be suitably lodged. That the house to which I had been brought was a private boarding estab-

lishment for ladies, I deemed by no means an objection; the mistress of it being manifestly a person of respectability; and within an hour I was comfortably installed there. You wonder perhaps, Margaret, why about a matter apparently so insignificant as a mere change of lodging, I am thus precise in detail; but if I tell this history at all, I must, as I before said, tell it in my own way; and in the course of my narration, I cannot refrain from numbering, as it were, the various petty links in that chain of circumstances by which, as towards the brink of a precipice, I was blindly conducted to where a great peril awaited me. But I must take up the broken thread of my narrative."

"It had proceeded," said Mrs. Gilbert, "only as far as your entering your new lodging—a boarding-house, as it proved."

"True; well, I found a quiet party there, with whom, however, I had little more intercourse than was absolutely necessary; the chief part of my time being spent in solitary sea-side rambles or reading in my own room. At the expiration

of a few weeks the season began to wane, and the company in the house almost daily became less. I was myself thinking of departure, when one morning, taking my accustomed lonely stroll on the shore I was suddenly seized with a feeling of illness; I sat down on a bench, luckily at hand, hoping that a few minutes rest would restore me; but instead of this, I was presently conscious of becoming so rapidly worse, that I knew, unless I could so far exert myself as at once to proceed home, I should be utterly unable, without assistance, to reach it at all. I rose up, therefore, though it seemed to me that I had scarcely the power to do so, and with much difficulty succeeded by slow steps, interrupted by frequent halting on the way, to accomplish my return. Unobserved, I entered the house and proceeded to my own chamber. Nearly fainting I cast myself upon the bed and had lain there I know not how long, but it must have been during several hours, when I was roused from the state of stupor rather than slumber into which I had fallen, by the prolonged ringing

of a sonorous bell: it was the summons to dinner, and finding that I paid no attention to it, a servant presently afterwards entered my apartment to tell me the company had assembled. With difficulty finding strength for utterance, I answered that I did not require dinner, and although my illness must have been fully apparent, without enquiry she left me.

“I was just at this time accidentally without a servant of my own: but hitherto, my requirements being few, I had experienced little inconvenience from the want of a special personal attendant; now, however, I felt my need of one to be imperative, for I was entirely helpless. As evening drew on I contrived, with some difficulty, to raise myself sufficiently to ring my bell, and bade the servant who answered it to desire her mistress to come and speak with me. Without much delay my request was complied with, and on my landlady's entrance she appeared greatly astonished at the condition in which she found me, and at once suggested my having medical advice. I empowered her to summon a phy-

sician, and also begged her to lose no time in hiring a servant for me; not a professed nurse, I said; and she promised that before night, she would seek out a suitable attendant. Meanwhile, with the aid of a servant, she assisted in undressing me, for on my return in the morning, overcome by faintness, I had lain down without the power of doing more than divest myself of my bonnet and shawl, and had ever since continued utterly helpless. In a little while I was made comparatively comfortable, by being placed in bed, and afterwards refreshed with a cup of tea. Before putting away the apparel I had lately worn, my landlady carefully took from the pocket of my gown, my purse and bunch of keys, and depositing them in a little silk bag that chanced to be lying on the toilet table, placed it under my pillow, for the sake, she said, of its being conveniently within my reach when I might need to have recourse to its contents.

“By the time my chamber had been duly put in order, I was becoming worse, and a physician was hastily summoned. He came almost imme-

diately, and from the remedies he prescribed, I was conscious that he considered me seriously ill. On his departure he ordered that I should not be left alone during the night, and my landlady, who was present, gave him to understand that such a contingency had been provided against. Afterwards in reply to some enquiry of mine as to the sort of person hired for my attendant, she told me that, knowing there could be little probability of procuring on so short a notice anything like an experienced servant, the day being Sunday, increasing, she added, the difficulty of doing so, she had engaged in the place of such a one a respectable woman, who was not, however, a professed sick nurse, though occasionally acting in that capacity, and who could at once come to me. In my then helpless condition, I was thankful to hear that attendance of any sort had been provided for me; and when presently, after a low tap at the door, the woman just mentioned entered my chamber, although her appearance, clearly enough, I thought, in spite of my landlady's representation,

denoted that her habitual vocation was merely that of a nurse of an inferior class, and I had, in the first instance, stipulated for quite another kind of attendant, I was by this time feeling so exceedingly ill that I could not but acknowledge to myself it was in point of fact a nurse, and nothing but a nurse, that I absolutely required. Seeing, therefore, that this woman, however humble her condition, was scrupulously neat in attire, and becoming each moment more painfully conscious of my weakness, I was by no means dissatisfied on her proceeding at once to station herself in a large chair at my bedside. I had not yet spoken to her, but presently on my enquiring by what name I should address her, she answered that she was always called "Nurse" by her employers. The woman's voice was peculiar—harsh in tone, but carefully modulated to a low key; and the expression of her countenance, which I now for the first time observed, was, I thought, a significant accompaniment to it. In the fierce black eyes gleaming forth from the dull sallowness of her complexion I could de-

fect, I believed, cunning as well as boldness: and the stubborn lines about the closely compressed lips denoted, it seemed to me, more than ordinary resolution. Altogether I was struck by the repulsiveness of the countenance, and turned away from my contemplation of the large pallid face with a feeling of disquiet that I found it difficult to quell. The woman was standing when next I looked towards her; and I then perceived that, although not tall, she was of remarkably sturdy frame; and that apparently her age was not much beyond fifty.

“I have now told you how unfavourable was the impression I received of this new attendant on her first appearance, but I very soon took myself severely to task for having formed, as I believed, a harsh and unjust opinion; for as my illness proceeded I found her patient, vigilant, and unwearied in attention. I must not, however, omit to mention that, prior to this change of judgment, on the morning immediately following her arrival, I was disagreeably struck by the watchful glitter of her eyes as I perceived

her, stealthily as it seemed, observing the opening of my purse, to which I was having recourse in order to hand over to my landlady a few sovereigns, in anticipation of expenses it might be necessary to incur on my account. Later on the same day a sort of indefinite suspicion again crossed my mind. I had just before given this woman my keys, desiring her to unlock a box containing some of my wearing apparel and a few other articles, and directed her to transfer a portion of its contents to a chest of drawers standing in the room. She had obeyed my instructions, and appeared about to close the box, when there was a pause in her movements. Raising myself a little on my pillow the better to observe her, I saw that my jewel-case was in her hands and open. You know, Margaret, my heir-loom of a few diamonds; on these her gaze was intently riveted. I spoke to her, bidding her put back the jewel-case and lock the box, but without seeming to hear me she continued her inspection. At last, however, as if satisfied with her view of the precious ornaments, she carefully closed the lid

over them and deposited the case where it before lay. But her attention was now attracted to other glittering objects, a gold watch, the works of which being at fault, I had put aside, and consigned, with other valuables not in daily use, to the safe keeping of my box, and a gold chain and bracelets were, one after the other, handled and examined by her. I now exerted my weakened voice to the utmost, and in a tone of as much authority as I could command, ordered her to cease meddling with my property and forthwith lock my box. This time she obeyed on the instant, but her eyes glittered fiercely on me, I thought, when after demanding the keys from her I put them in the bag beneath my pillow."

"Oh, how could you venture to keep such a fearful creature as this about you?" cried Mrs. Gilbert.

"There was no alternative; and in the capacity of nurse she was really invaluable to me," answered Miss Dale. "I have told you with what care she tended me, and this in no wise relaxed after the affair I have related; on the contrary,

it seemed to me that her attention redoubled, and it was not long before I reproached myself for assigning any significant meaning to the glance I had met, and for having judged harshly the liberty taken with my treasures, which I considered was after all probably a mere manifestation of ignorant curiosity. And I very shortly ceased to think of the circumstance at all, and became too ill to feel concern about any matter."

"And in this sad condition was this woman your only attendant? Did not any of the party in the house proffer their assistance—or at least the landlady overlook your sick room?"

"I told you, I think, that when I was first taken ill the company in the house had begun to disperse, and in the course of a few days, as I was informed, all of them had gone. As for my landlady, she, after the first day or two of my illness, in no way endeavoured to alleviate the misery of my condition; indeed, she rarely approached me, and never without bewailing that I had brought the trouble of sickness to her

house, and I gathered from various circumstances that she was most anxious that I should be removed from it without loss of time, lest, as the nurse one day told me, my death should occur there, an event which she considered might have a disadvantageous effect on her establishment. My physician, however, I found strenuously opposed all thought of my removal, insisting that my state was too critical to justify him in giving his consent to such a measure. I extracted this opinion myself from him, when on some occasion, urged by the obvious desire of my landlady to get rid of me, I had expressed a wish, if possible, to be carried elsewhere."

"Your position must have been miserable, indeed. But why did not you summon some of your relations or friends?"

"I was too ill to take any step for myself—too ill, indeed, for any wish to suggest itself to my mind beyond that of obtaining relief for the moment. My very soul as well as my body had become prostrate, and I cared little whether life or death should be the issue of my sickness."

“What was the nature of it?” enquired Mrs. Gilbert.

“It was pleurisy; and so difficult to conquer that the severe remedies administered left me more dead than alive, when occasionally they succeeded in abating the disease.”

“Were you satisfied with your physician?”

“Perfectly; his attention was unremitting. At the height of my illness he visited me three or four times a day, and in every way evinced genuine anxiety for my recovery. He wanted experience, perhaps, for he was a young man, but on the whole I am inclined to believe that I could hardly have fallen into better hands.”

“But I am surprised he allowed that strange nurse to remain with you.”

“I made no complaint of her, and he saw that she was helpful and vigilant. He did, however, propose that she should have an assistant; but to this the woman herself strenuously objected, insisting that it was quite unnecessary, for that she was perfectly capable of watching me both by day and night as much as I required.

And this indeed seemed to be the case; her strength never appeared to flag, and she was always ready to obey my lightest summons."

"What, night after night did this one woman sit up with you?"

"That was not requisite. Every night she brought in a mattress from an adjoining chamber and made up a temporary bed beside mine, on which occasionally she lay down and slept; but at my slightest movement she awoke, and almost before I could rouse myself to speak, her vigilant eyes were bending over me. I often seem to see those eyes," added Miss Dale, shuddering; but presently recovering herself, and proceeding with her recital: "I have been telling you," she said, "of my nurse's zeal and alacrity in serving me; but on the sixth night of my illness there was a remarkable change in her conduct. She appeared gloomy and sullen, and manifested, I thought, cruel indifference to my suffering. I had become worse during the last twenty-four hours, and by my doctor's order she was sitting up with me, and had, as I well remember, taken

her station near the window, whence she seemed often to be looking out into the darkness. I had had more than one fainting fit in the course of the day, and through the night had suffered greatly from exhaustion; but now, after many weary hours had gone by, there was creeping over me a feeling of more than exhaustion: I thought, indeed, that life itself was departing, and almost involuntarily stretching forth my arms toward the silent watcher in my chamber, the only human being within reach of my appeal, I cried:

“‘O! come to me—I am dying!’

“‘And if you *are* dying, what’s the good of calling out to me?’ answered the woman, in a harsh, stern tone, and without approaching, fixing on me her glittering eyes. I closed mine in very terror, but it was only for a moment I was thus overpowered; the excitement of alarm giving an impetus to my being, called back the fleeting powers of life; I felt the sudden rallying of my strength, and, with a vigour that was new to me, half raised myself from my recum-

bent posture, and looked steadily forward. O joyful sight! There was a ray of morning stealing through an opening of the window curtain, and though the terrible eyes still glared at me, I was at once delivered from my vague terror, feeling instinctively that there was safety in the heavenly presence of day. It was not that I had been in darkness, for the lamp still steadfastly burned; but while night reigned without, the mere light of the chamber could bestow no sense of security."

"But what was the fear that so cruelly assailed you?"

"It had no definite shape, even at the height of my alarm, and faded into complete indistinctness as morning advanced, and the nurse lay down to rest; and when, afterwards, she was attending me with a return of her accustomed alacrity, I took shame to myself for having, with vague and inexplicable suspicion, regarded the indications of neglect and impatience, which, through her really arduous service she had on the preceding night, for the first time manifested;

and while I was taking this view of the subject, the woman, as if reading my thoughts, very humbly apologised for her delinquencies, alleging, in excuse for them, that she believed she had been neither asleep nor awake, and had hardly known what she said or did."

"This explanation would not have satisfied me, however," said Mrs. Gilbert. "And certainly in your place I could not have kept such a person about me."

"My dear Margaret, in my place you would have done exactly as I did. I was ill and weak beyond description, and had no mental energy at command. This nurse had been provided for my attendant, as I was told, the only one then to be obtained, and it seemed to me that if I dismissed her I might perish for want of aid in the interval of waiting for her place to be supplied."

"Yet, if you had given but a hint of your suspicion or dissatisfaction in regard to this woman to your doctor, he, without doubt, would have taken her dismissal upon himself, and at once have provided you with an efficient and trustworthy nurse."

“I never saw him but in the presence of the woman herself; and I was at this time so utterly prostrate in mind as well as in body, that I absolutely had not the courage to take any measure inimical to her. She had, in fact, acquired over me the sort of ascendancy, so commonly exercised by the strong over the weak, and this circumstance you must not fail to bear in mind as I proceed with my history.”

“I begin now fully to comprehend all the difficulties of your sad position,” said Mrs. Gilbert, “and I expect presently to hear that this wretched nurse did not long continue on her good behaviour, in spite of her humble apologies.”

“She had hardly made these apologies,” resumed Miss Dale, “when suddenly I caught sight of an expression of her countenance so vividly recalling to me the fearful gaze I had encountered during the previous night, that for awhile I lay actually trembling under its influence. The excess of the panic presently subsided, and I began to reason with myself on the folly of it, and to make an effort to turn my thoughts into another channel; but in spite of my endeavour one idea

became paramount,—a dread of passing the ensuing night under the sole guardianship of my appointed watcher. Stimulated to action by the poignancy of this terror, my mind gathered temporary strength, and almost for the first time since my illness I was able to endeavour to make an effort in my own behalf. My doctor had said on the preceding evening that, unless he should find me better to-day, he would apprise some of my family of my illness, and had enquired how soon after the despatch of his letter it would be possible for them to be with me. Not till late in the following day, I had told him. But now it occurred to me that from the little pier within sight of the house in which I was lodged, a steam packet daily started for a neighbouring sea-port, and thus that, earlier than by transmission of a letter through the post, intelligence of my illness might be conveyed to one of my relations residing there, who would I knew gladly afford me all the aid in his power; and that having no member of his family capable of attending me, for he was a widower with only young children, he would not,

I was confident, refuse to allow one of his servants, whom I well knew as a valuable and trustworthy person, to come to me without loss of time; and the return of the packet would, as I concluded, enable her to be with me before night set in. I therefore determined, if possible, to write a few words, stating my request, and to entrust to my doctor, whose early visit I was every minute expecting, the forwarding this express. There were writing materials at hand, and I presently astonished the nurse by desiring her to give me pen, ink, and paper, and to place a book by way of a desk before me. And now it was necessary to direct her to raise me up a little and support me in a sitting posture, the better to enable me to write. She silently obeyed my instructions; but while thus being upheld by her I felt that she was herself heavily leaning forward and lending over me; and when with a feeble hand I slowly scrawled on the page of letter paper before me, 'I am very ill. Spare Charlotte to be with me *to-night*,' I suspected that my petition was exposed to her scrutiny,

and turning towards her, on the conclusion of my task, I perceived that her gaze was indeed intently riveted on the words I had written. I at once therefore told her that I was requesting to have a family servant sent to me; and then, as well as I was able, beginning to fold my despatch, I again asked for the pen in order to direct it, that it might be in readiness, I said, for my doctor to take charge of. The woman snatched the paper out of my hand.

“ ‘You shall not give this to the doctor,’ she exclaimed in a voice loud with rage.

“ ‘How dare you speak to me thus?’ I cried.

“ ‘How dare I, indeed? How dare you think of setting a woman over me? I will not have it done, I tell you,’ she said vehemently, fixing on me her fierce gaze.

“ ‘Trembling I sank back on my pillow. The woman bent over me.

“ ‘I ask your pardon,’ she said, in an altered tone, ‘my temper was up, and no wonder, for it’s hard to be used in this way after watching you by day and by night all through your illness,

and with your friends coming to-morrow and they not to know the care that I've taken of you, but the very last night to have a stranger put over me to take away all the credit of it from me.'

" 'Give me back the paper,' I said. But the woman continued to withhold it, 'I did not think I'd been spending my strength for a lady who could serve me like this,' she persisted; 'and what's more I can't put up with it.'

"I was becoming miserably oppressed; I could feel her hot breath as she leaned over me, and had no way of escape from her fixed gaze.

" 'I wan't more air,' I cried. But she did not move; 'you must not say anything to the doctor about that letter,' she said, hissing the words close to my ear.

" 'O leave me! leave me! or I shall die,' I exclaimed in an agony.

" 'You must promise first,' she insisted.

" 'Go, go then,' I said in desperation.

" 'Do you promise?' she asked sternly.

" 'I do promise,' I answered, seeing no other

way of gaining present relief. and feeling indeed that I had not strength for further opposition. 'I do promise.' I had hardly uttered the words when my doctor entered. The woman whispered, 'remember,' as she made a pretence of arranging my pillows, and did not remove her eyes from me during his visit. He seemed surprised at the state in which he found me, it was obviously more unfavourable than he had expected. After prescribing some remedies to be immediately applied, he said he should call again in the course of two or three hours to see their effect. Just as he was leaving the chamber he came back again to my bed side, once more felt my pulse, and telling me that he should lose no time in writing to my relations, enquired if I had any especial message for them. The nurse was again busy-ing herself with my pillow, and I felt that her gaze was on me.

" 'No,' I answered, 'I merely wished them to be made acquainted with my illness.' "

" Oh!" cried Mrs. Gilbert, "you ought not to have regarded the promise that wicked woman

extorted from you. You should have told him everything."

"I know that I should; but it seemed then impossible to me. And, indeed, the conviction that I was growing rapidly worse, coupled with something unusual in my doctor's manner, made me suspect that death was not far off. And with that solemn prospect I began to lose sight of everything else; and very soon all thought of the plan I had so vainly endeavoured to arrange, passed from my mind."

"And how did the nurse now conduct herself towards you?"

"With the utmost zeal: sparing herself no exertion, and applying all the remedies ordered with extreme promptitude. So genuine, indeed, did her solicitude for my recovery appear, that I could not forbear thanking her for the assiduous attention she bestowed on me. But in spite of all the means used to abate my malady, it continued to increase, and when the doctor, according to promise, paid his second visit, he made no attempt to conceal from me that I was

in a very precarious condition. The knowledge of my danger, however, in no wise agitated me. The sense of physical pain and distress seemed to absorb all my faculties, and the prospect of death brought no terror now, for imagination was powerless. I lay in a passive condition, with the full consciousness of a miserable state of being, and capable of no feeling beyond this. But soon I had a third visit from my doctor, when he prescribed for me again, and this time with extraordinary success; for, under the influence of the new remedies ordered, my malady rapidly abated, and when towards evening my kind physician once more visited me, he told me with a joyful countenance that all danger was now over."

"From my innermost heart a cry of thankfulness arose, as freed from the miserable oppression under which I had suffered, I became conscious of the new vigour that, like a gush of healthful air refreshing a heavy atmosphere, brought to my languishing being sudden exhilaration. Thoughts of dear friends, of pleasant homes, of

trees, of waves, of sunsets, came crowding to my mind, and indifferent as I had so lately been to the near prospect of death, I now felt that life was precious, and rejoiced in the renovated force of the subtle mystery stirring freshly the frame that but a little hour ago had seemed so ready for the grave. But my respite from peril was short. I was soon in greater jeopardy than that of sickness," said Miss Dale with an altered voice, and the light of a lamp, which a moment before had been brought into the apartment, revealed the pallid hue overspreading not only her cheeks but also her trembling lips. After a pause, however, that restored her to composure, resuming her narrative, she said :

"In the prospect of my recovery the nurse appeared unfeignedly to rejoice, and busied herself about me incessantly, so that her zeal in my service somewhat disturbed me, and I was glad when late in the evening she proposed leaving me awhile, in order to make a few purchases, she said, of tea, arrowroot, and other trifling things, of which, according to her account, I stood in

need. Before going she, of course, asked me for money, and I gave her some, taking it from the bag that contained likewise my keys, and that had, as I have already mentioned, for the sake of my convenience, been placed beneath my pillow, where now on putting back my purse I again mechanically thrust it. The woman went out immediately afterwards, but was not long absent; and appeared I thought, on her return in a strangely excited state, talking with extraordinary volubility, and hurrying over the arrangements that she called 'settling me for the night,' with most unusual rapidity. Still, owing to her having gone out in the course of the evening, it was later than ordinary before my bed was finally smoothed, and I was feeling very weary and inclined to sleep when she suddenly left my apartment. I supposed at first that she was merely gone to the adjoining chamber to fetch the mattress that she was in the habit of using as a couch for herself, but when a very long time elapsed without her return I began to wonder what could occasion her unusual absence; and

then there came to me the recollection of the events of the early morning, which in the alternations of my illness during the day I had absolutely ceased to think of. Now, however, all the suspicious circumstances in relation to the overthrow of the plan that I had formed for this night's security occurred to my mind with full force. And yet, as I reasoned with myself, what danger could the *absence* of the woman portend? it was her *presence* that had been so fearful to me. As I continued to consider the subject in a variety of bearings, presently a new light seemed to break on me, and I surmised that notwithstanding the zeal in my service she had so recently displayed, the woman had not forgotten the suspicion that without doubt I had betrayed, and was now altogether absenting herself from me in consequence. A harmless revenge, I thought, and having arrived at this satisfactory conclusion I began to compose myself to rest. Just as I was falling off to sleep, however, I was roused by the opening of my door, and looking towards it I perceived the nurse enter.

“ ‘It is very late, where have you been?’ I said.

“ ‘Yes, it is very late,’ she answered, ‘but I’m only just come in; I’ve been a good step, and I’ll tell you where to, I’ve been to the doctor’s.’

“ ‘To the doctor’s!’ I cried, ‘what for?’

“ ‘Well, I’ll speak the truth,’ she said, ‘’twas because I saw that you was not so well as you ought to be.’

“ ‘You did wrong to go to him,’ I said, ‘I am very sorry that he should have the trouble of coming to me at this late hour, there is no sort of occasion for it; I am better to-night than I have been at all since my illness.’

“ ‘You are not better, though you may think it; there are bad signs about you,’ she said, approaching my bed-side and fixing a penetrating gaze on me.

“ ‘What do you mean?’ I cried.

“ ‘I mean what I say,’ she answered. ‘But the doctor isn’t coming to you. His house was all shut up for the night when I got there, but I knocked and knocked till I got the door opened

to me; and after keeping me waiting a precious time he gets up, for he was gone to bed, and comes down to me; and when I told him what was the matter he said says he, 'Nurse, you are one in a thousand, I could trust any patient's life to you. You did quite right to come to me.' And then he goes away for a minute, and when he comes back, he says, 'you need not go to the druggist's, I'll send something myself,' and so he gives me this little bottle and shews me what's in it, and says, 'you mix that with some water and give it to the lady to take directly you gets home, and she'll be all right in the morning.'

" 'Shew me the bottle,' I said.

" She held before me a small vial containing a minute portion of light coloured liquid.

" 'You may put it aside: I shall not take it,' I said.

" 'You'll die if you don't; the doctor said as much,' cried the woman.

" 'You did not tell me that before,' I observed.

" 'Ah, but he did say it though,' she persisted.

“ I began to grow bewildered. ‘ What is it you mean? What is the matter with me?’ I cried. ‘ But I don’t believe you know.’

“ ‘ Don’t I ?’ exclaimed the woman, ‘ I haven’t nursed so many sick people before now without learning what’s their bad signs,’ and she uttered a low derisive laugh.

“ I shuddered.

“ ‘ Come, take the physic,’ she said authoritatively, pouring into a wine-glass half filled with water, the few drops contained in the vial, ‘ take the physic,’ and she held the glass to my lips.

“ I paused an instant—and in that instant there passed through my mind a rush of conflicting thoughts; but all whispering to me of danger. It was deep in the night—the house was wrapped in silence. Except in this one chamber, where now the eyes of the watcher and the watched so piercingly confronted each other, all were buried in sleep; I was at the mercy of an unscrupulous hireling; supposing her purpose to be evil, if I did not swallow the draught pre-

sented to me, she would doubtless find other means to effect her object. If, on the other hand, she was not dealing treacherously by me—if she had spoken truth—if, indeed, she had perceived symptoms of danger where I had apprehended none, and the physician had, as she said, enjoined my having immediate recourse to the remedy she brought, should I not be throwing away a chance of my life by refusing to take it! There was hazard in either alternative, but of one or the other I must take the risk, and silently commending myself to God, I drank the offered potion.”

“Oh!” cried her friend, “what a perilous choice you made! Why did you not rather alarm the household? Had you no bell with which you could have rung such a peal as would have aroused the deepest sleepers?”

“The woman was standing over me watchful of my every movement, and what charge could I have brought against her, if indeed it had been possible to raise an alarm? I could have stated only my suspicions, which undoubtedly she would

have indignantly repudiated, and the attempted accusation would in all probability have excited her revenge and thus increased my peril."

"How terrible was your position!"

"It was terrible. After swallowing the draught I leaned back on my pillow, but determined, if possible, to keep my eyes unclosed. The curtains of my bed were partially undrawn, and I was thus enabled to watch the movements of the nurse. There was a remarkable alteration in her demeanour from the moment she received from my hand the glass I had emptied of its contents. She became perfectly silent, and in traversing the room moved so cautiously that her usually heavy step was almost inaudible. I intently observed her every proceeding, and noticed, not without an access of alarm, that she made no preparation as usual to retire to rest. Indeed the mattress and pillows that on each previous night she had carefully arranged for herself as a couch, she had not this night brought into the chamber; nor did she even place herself in the large chair beside my bed, or make any altera-

tion in her apparel; but after very quietly setting down the empty wine glass on a table, with noiseless movements, she proceeded forthwith to seat herself on my large travelling-box that stood at the farther end of the apartment, exactly opposite the opening of my curtain. In this position the light of a candle that burned near fell directly on the countenance of the woman, and I perceived it was of ghastly paleness, and that her fierce black eyes were immoveably fixed on me, while from time to time her whitened lips moved, and I heard her mutter in broken sentences, 'It's swallowed! How long!—how long!'

"After awhile she rose softly, with stealthy footsteps approached my bed, and bending over it scrutinizingly surveyed me. My gaze steadily confronted hers, and she presently withdrew, returning to her former position. It was not long however till she again cautiously drew near, and contemplated me silently as before, and again I returned her scrutiny. Once more she withdrew, but this time instead of reseating herself advanced towards the table on which she had

placed the wine glass, and where stood a candle burning. Watching her with unflinching intensity, I saw that she took from her pocket a very small white paper package, which she carefully unfolded and then emptied the contents into the glass from which I had recently drunk, next pouring a little water there also. For a few minutes afterwards her attitude denoted that she was intently scrutinizing the potion she had prepared, but as she bent over it her countenance was hidden from me. Presently, however, raising herself from this stooping posture, she took the glass in her hand and held it up towards the light as if for yet more careful inspection of its contents, and I then caught sight of her face. It was of an almost livid hue, and wore an expression of fear, I thought, as well as guilt; and when the next moment, gasping and visibly trembling, still holding the glass in her hand, she slowly advanced towards me, the terror she was under became yet more manifest. As she drew near my bed-side and stood there, her sturdy form absolutely shook, and she turned aside her

countenance, seemingly unable to endure the gaze I had fixed on it, as with a trembling hand she held the glass towards me, and hoarsely whispered,—

“ ‘Take this—it will do you good.’ ”

“ ‘Let me see your face!’ I cried vehemently.

“ But she still averted it, repeating: ‘Take this.’ ”

“ ‘I will not take it,’ I said.

“ She immediately retreated, and again approaching the table, at once emptied the potion she had offered me into a washhand basin that stood there. Then taking up the white paper in which had been wrapped that which she put in the glass, she tore it into minute fragments, and threw them also in the basin, pouring there besides some tea left in a cup, and some unfinished medicine from a bottle. Having done thus she returned to her former seat on the box facing my bed. I continued my strict observation, not once removing my gaze from her, although notwithstanding the excitement of my

alarm, I felt from time to time almost overpowered by a strong inclination to sleep, and had great difficulty in keeping my eyelids resolutely unclosed."

"Under all these dreadful circumstances, what wonderful courage and self-possession you had!" cried Mrs. Gilbert.

"Not courage, but an intense watchfulness inspired by fear. And now, as I continued my vigilant observation, I found the woman's countenance terrible to look on. The expression of it was not always the same. At one moment I could perceive in the eyes so fiercely glittering, a gleam of cruelty and, as it seemed to me, of deadly hate. The next instant a painful spasm appeared to convulse her whole frame, for her body shook, while the involuntary working of the muscles of the face revealed her endurance of some sharp agony, and she wiped her brow as if the damps of death were there. Then would come a change—a look of dogged resolution—of hard wickedness, which I could not behold without knowing that my peril was imminent.

I now determined to secure, if possible, the means of raising an alarm in the event of my being subjected to any treacherous attack. There was a bell-rope at the head of my bed, but the handle of it hung too high for me to reach without raising myself up in my bed, and I durst not attempt any movement of this sort, lest the nurse, whose gaze was on me, should have a suspicion of my design and frustrate it. But I now remembered that on the first evening of my illness, on account of the bell handle hanging above my reach, a long piece of string had been fastened to it by my landlady, to enable me, if I required it, to ring as I lay. It so chanced that I had made no use of this string, but it was still there, I knew; the end of it buried, as I believed, somewhere behind the bolster of my bed. With the utmost caution, that there might be no sound of my movement, I slid my hand under the bolster in the direction that I thought the precious cord must lie, and there to my infinite joy succeeded in seizing hold of it. Fortunately, it was of considerable

length, and pulling it noiselessly into my bed, I wound it many times round my wrist, in order to be secure against any attempt that might be made suddenly to wrest it from me. I had hardly succeeded in effecting my object, when the woman, who had not once taken her gaze off me, slowly rose and approached my bed, beside which she stood for a moment, silent and immoveable: but her eyes glared at me, and the sound of her heavy and unequal breathing came loudly on my ear. I secretly made a movement to pull the bell-cord, but owing to my endeavour to avoid detection, the effort was too feeble, and I failed in my purpose of sounding an alarm. I now lay perfectly still, gazing into the terrible eyes, and fearful of making a trial to repeat my attempt, lest the movement, being observed, should hasten the dreadful catastrophe that I believed to be impending. Presently the woman drew yet nearer, and the next moment stooping over me, and in a tone that boded treachery, whispered:

“ ‘ Let your dear nurse kiss you?’

“She suddenly cast her arm round my neck.

“ ‘Woman, you would murder me!’ I cried; and inspired by the urgency of my peril with strength and courage almost miraculous, I released myself from her hold, and pushing her forcibly from me, looked sternly on her guilty countenance. At first, as if absolutely overpowered by my resolution, she stood utterly motionless, but in another moment she had made a step forward, and with outstretched arm was again stooping over me, when impelled by fearful agony, I uttered a scream loud and piercing.

“ ‘What! you would raise the house, would you?’ she cried, and I felt her hand on my throat; but now, with the energy of desperation, I violently pulled the cord secured to my wrist, and a startling peal of the bell instantaneously answered the movement. At the surprise of this alarm the woman staggered back, releasing my throat from her grasp, and casting around her a quick glance of affright. Again with all my strength I pulled the cord and shrieked aloud. While the bell yet pealed, my

door was partially opened from the outside, and the terrified face of my landlady peered into the chamber.

“ ‘O! save me! save me!’ I cried; ‘take this woman from me! she would murder me!’

“ ‘The poor lady’s light-headed. The fever’s strong on her,’ said the nurse.

“ ‘It is false,’ I exclaimed; ‘I am not light-headed. Take this wicked woman away!’

“ ‘But although I now perceived, besides my landlady, a group of affrighted looking females in their white night-garments, standing at the door-way, not one of them advanced. I rose up and was about to make an attempt to leave my bed, but the nurse held me back.

“ ‘O, come to me! Come to me!’ I cried imploringly, stretching out my arms towards the terrified household. ‘Come to me!’

“ ‘Don’t come near her! she’s gone raving mad; but I’ll manage her,’ said the woman, and with a strong grasp she held me down on my bed.

“ ‘I am not mad! Will nobody come to my help?’ I exclaimed in an agony.

“My appeal was disregarded, but I heard a voice say, ‘go for the Doctor.’

“ ‘Yes, go to him, go to him,’ I cried, ‘tell him to lose not an instant. Say that my life is at stake.’

“The woman gave me a cruel gripe.

“ ‘Will you leave me at the mercy of this savage creature?’ I shrieked, struggling to release myself from her hold.

“ ‘You’d better shut the door: she’s growing noisy again,’ said the woman, almost crushing me in her powerful arms.

“O, no, no! Leave me not alone with this cruel woman!’ I cried imploringly. ‘She will kill me.’

“ ‘You see how mad she is,’ exclaimed the wretch.

“And now, indeed, I felt that my brain began to reel: and although I was conscious of struggling violently against the efforts made to hold me down on my bed, and of watching the door in intense terror lest it should be closed, the horrors I had passed through during the preced-

ing hours, and the fierce strife for very life, as it seemed to me, in which I was at that moment involved, were not without their terrible result; I knew that my mind was losing its balance, and with this dreadful conviction came an agony more appalling than any I had yet experienced. Whether my reason would not, indeed, have become overthrown if I had continued much longer exposed to the complicated and frightful miseries I was enduring is, I think, hardly doubtful. But relief was at hand. My kind physician, with a speed impelled by zeal, answered the hasty summons he had received, and at sight of him, in the joyful sense of security, the torture of my brain instantaneously ceased, and my tottering mind recovered its just equilibrium. I believe, however, my heartfelt thankfulness for the succour that at length had arrived, appeared to be manifested with undue extravagance, for my doctor afterwards told me that he was no sooner at my bed-side, than I clung to him in what seemed a delirious ecstasy; and no wonder, for he did indeed appear to me as an angel of de-

liverance. But after the first rush of joy had spent itself, I remembered that I had a terrible accusation to make, and looked for the nurse, who, on the physician's appearance had at once relinquished her hold of me; and perceiving that she was at that very moment passing out of the apartment, I cried vehemently, 'Stop that woman! Do not suffer her to escape! She would have murdered me!' My command, however, seemed to be altogether disregarded, except that the doctor quietly answered, 'Have no fear. She shall not come near you.'

" 'But go,' I cried, 'give her in charge to the police.'

He now left the room for a few minutes.

" 'Have you given her in custody?' I anxiously enquired on his return.

" 'She is well watched,' he replied.

" I was aware that he answered me evasively, and in order to enforce the necessity of the proceeding I had directed, began narrating to him the dreadful occurrences of the night. But he would not suffer me to proceed. 'You

must not speak,' he said; 'perfect quiet is essential for your recovery.'

" 'But I must speak,' I cried; 'I must at least tell you that it is very likely I have had poison administered to me. The woman who afterwards made a direct attack on my life, gave me something that she said you had sent, and I swallowed it.'

" 'I did send it,' he said.

" 'I was surprised. 'But perhaps she tampered with it,' I suggested.

" 'I believe not, but if she did, if you have swallowed anything noxious, here is an antidote for it,' he said, pouring into a glass some dark-coloured fluid from a small vial, and afterwards holding it to my lips, 'take this, and don't say another word.'

" 'I took the dose, that tasted strongly of laudanum, and giving him back the glass, 'Who is to stay with me?' I enquired.

" 'I will myself remain with you, provided you do not speak,' he answered, and seated himself at my bed-side.

“ A delightful calm almost immediately began to steal over me, and I must very soon have become utterly unconscious, for not a sound reached me till I know not how long afterwards, when I became aware that some one was moving about my apartment, and slowly opening my eyes, I perceived that it was broad daylight, and that one of the servants of the house was busying herself at a table near me, ‘ I am only clearing away the things the nurse told me to,’ she said, observing my looks directed towards her. At the sound of this fearful name there flashed before me, on the instant, a vivid recollection of the occurrences of the previous night, and I knew that a basin, which, among other articles, the servant was now preparing to carry out of the room, was the one into which had been thrown the draught I refused to swallow.

“ ‘ Remove nothing,’ I said, but on attempting to speak, I found I was so weak that my voice was scarcely audible. Whether she did not hear me speak or mistook what I said, I don’t know, but she proceeded in her employment, and just,

as with her hands full, she was about to leave the chamber, turned her head towards me, and said, 'Would you like to see the nurse?'

" 'Where is she?' I cried in alarm.

" 'Down-stairs,' she answered.

" 'O stay with me—stay with me!' I cried in an agony, 'don't let her come to me!'

" But the servant only closed the door and went her way.

" A terrible panic came over me; I trembled from head to foot, my heart palpitated violently, and a dimness was on my sight. I believe that I then fainted, for I was conscious of nothing further till I saw my physician standing over me, and felt his hand on my wrist. He did not speak, but sat down beside me, every now and then again feeling my pulse. I was too weak to utter a word, and tears were involuntarily running down my cheeks; but I was able to look up thankfully when the good doctor took a fresh handkerchief from his pocket, and softly wiped them away. In a little while I was somewhat revived, and he asked if I had had any breakfast. 'No,' I answered, 'I had had nothing.'

“ He rang and ordered tea to be made for me immediately; when it was brought giving it to me himself and supporting me whilst I took it. By-and-bye he enquired whether anything had that morning occurred to agitate me. ‘ I had been told that the nurse was below,’ I answered, ‘ and was frightened at the thought that she might come to me.’

“ ‘ What that woman here now ! ’ he exclaimed; ‘ I must see to this; ’ and he hastily left the apartment.

“ Returning shortly, he told me that I need be under no further apprehension for that he had ordered the woman at once to go.

“ ‘ Why is she not in custody ? ’ I enquired.

“ ‘ We will talk about that some other time, ’ he said; and then proceeded to tell me that before coming to me that morning he had sent for a trustworthy person to attend on me, who he hoped would have been able to come immediately, but had found to his disappointment that she could not be released from an engagement she was under at present till early in the afternoon, when however she had promised, without

fail, to be with me. A servant presently entering the room to take away my tea cup, he desired her to remain and sit with me awhile, saying that he must now go, but would return in the course of an hour to see how I was going on. After his departure I closed my eyes and lay quite still, and the servant probably thought I was sleeping and that there was no further need of her remaining with me, for she very soon deserted her post at my bed-side; and though on hearing her move I opened my eyes, and seeing that she was about to quit the chamber, feebly attempted to call her back, she appeared not to hear me, and quickly disappeared, closing the door after her.

“ And now I fell into a half dreaming state, seeming to see gloomy woodland paths and dark troubled waters, and to hear low moaning wind. And the pain of a sad farewell lay on my heart, as when I had felt the last touch of a loving hand, now long cold in death; and yet all the while I was conscious of lying helpless on my sick bed in a solitary chamber. How long this

disordered reverie or slumber lasted I know not, but I was fearfully roused from it. Some sound disturbed me, and unclosing my eyes I beheld the dreadful nurse advancing, her eyes glaring fiercely, and her white lips trembling; she came hurrying to my bedside. Almost maddened by terror, screaming loudly and seizing the bell-cord, I rang a peal, that resounded through the house, and the woman, instantly retreating, hastened out of the chamber. More than one of the household now hurriedly answered my startling summons, but sudden fear had deprived me of the power of coherent speech; and I was at first utterly unable to explain the cause of my alarm. When presently, however, instead of the hard inquisitorial glances of the wondering servants who had obeyed my terrified call, I met the kind calm gaze of the Doctor, who was now standing beside me, I became more composed, and in a little while was able to tell him the occasion of the miserable agitation in which he had found me. He appeared greatly astonished at my communication, and as soon as I had become completely

pacified, quitted me for a few minutes, during which I heard the sound of angry words passing between himself and my landlady in an adjoining apartment. On his return, he assured me that he had ascertained the nurse had now positively left the house; and on my expressing some apprehension lest she might come back to it, and again force herself into my presence, he said that in order to set my fears completely at rest he would himself remain with me until the arrival of the person whom he had secured for my attendant, and forthwith stationed himself in the large chair beside my bed, enjoining me to endeavour to sleep. I ardently thanked him and attempted to say something of my regret for encroaching so much on his time. He cut short my apology, saying it chanced he had no visits that morning to pay; adding, presently, that it was Sunday, and he would sit with me instead of going to church. I felt that he was the Good Samaritan, and I believe I told him so. He sat by me hour after hour, with the utmost patience, which must have been severely tried by my utter dis-

regard of his repeated injunctions of silence, for now, incited by fever probably, I talked incessantly. But whenever I recurred to the events of the past night he would not allow me to proceed with the subject, and at last, in order effectually to enforce my obedience, protested that he would leave me if I persisted in returning to it. Dreading his departure above all things I durst not dispute his command, though I felt, whilst obeying him, that in this instance the course he was pursuing for the establishment of my tranquillity was a mistaken one. Presently, in the midst of some excited discourse of mine, simply I believe with the view of interrupting it, he placed a half-folded piece of letter-paper before me, saying, that perceiving there was writing on it, he had just taken it up from the floor by my bed-side, supposing it might accidentally have dropped from my portfolio.

“I at once recognized the appeal I had written on the preceding morning, and which the nurse had snatched from me.

“‘Oh, read it,’ I cried; ‘it is the very paper

I was talking about when you would not let me tell you a word more.'

"He did read it.

" 'And you intended giving this to me to forward for you,' he said.

" 'Yes, but as I told you, the woman prevented me,' and I began once more to relate some of the suspicious circumstances that I had previously attempted to inform him of, but becoming agitated in the course of my recital, he again prohibited me from continuing it.

" 'And I know all this already,' he said; 'you forget the history that you were giving me last night.'

" 'I do not forget it, but I believe you thought me mad then,' I cried.

" 'Not mad,' he answered, 'but in a painfully excited state.'

" 'But what had brought me to this state? Was it not the horror that wicked woman had caused me to suffer?' I exclaimed vehemently, starting up from my pillow, and then falling back, trembling violently.

“ ‘Hush! hush!’ he cried; ‘you will become very ill if you agitate yourself in this manner.’

“ ‘I am very ill already,’ I said faintly.

“ ‘You are,’ he replied, ‘but you will assuredly become much worse without the quiet that I have enjoined. You ought not to utter a word, and you should endeavour, if possible, to sleep.’

“ ‘But will you believe what I have told you?’ I asked earnestly.

“ ‘I will enquire into it all, and I will keep this note, if you will let me,’ he said. ‘It may be well to have recourse to it in the examination I shall make,’ and he placed it in his pocket-book.

“It was obvious, I thought, that he was regarding the statements I had made in a new light; that he no longer considered them as the mere creations of a disordered fancy; and under this conviction I became tranquillized, and it was not long before I sank into a quiet slumber. On waking, my kind watcher introduced to me, as the new nurse he had provided, a pleasant-

looking woman, who seemed to have just entered the apartment, and then, after giving some directions to her and bestowing a few words of medical advice upon me, forthwith took his departure.

“I was now in hourly expectation of the arrival of my relations, but owing to some untoward circumstances—some delay, as I afterwards understood, in their receiving my doctor’s summons, they failed to appear; and as daylight waned, remembering the last packet must some time have arrived, I knew that their coming before the morrow was impossible. Thus I had one more night to pass without the solace of beholding a familiar face, and as it approached I felt a dread that I was ashamed to acknowledge, but yet found impossible to conquer, of being watched through the dark hours only by the solitary stranger so recently appointed as my attendant, and on the plea of the possibility occurring of its being necessary to send a summons to my doctor during the night, I suggested to my new nurse that she should procure the ser-

vices of some person to share her watch. A *young* woman, I insisted, for in truth after my terrible experience I loathed the thought of any other; and when, obeying my instructions, she brought to my bedside a gentle-faced girl, whose innocent countenance was as refreshing to my sight as was to my parched lips the glass of fresh water that I presently received at her timid hands, I felt the blessed conviction of security from harm, and thankfully resigned myself to the drowsy influence that was stealing over me, and soon I slept, slept peacefully. On awakening from time to time, I loved to rest my eyes on the young girl's fair face, that was always bending over a little bible she had brought with her, the light of a candle near which she sat streaming across her placid brow. How vividly the remembrance of that sweet young face came before me, when a few weeks afterwards, while I still lingered on a sick bed, I was told that the grave had closed over it. Meditating on this early death, 'Wherefore,' I asked myself, 'should *I* be struggling to retain an

already half-worn existence?' a weary burthen, too, as it seemed to me then.

"But to return to the night I was speaking of. In my intervals of wakefulness, very precious now seemed to me this life of mine, so lately rescued from the most imminent peril, and that yet from hour to hour I held only by the most precarious tenure. But one week had elapsed since the commencement of my illness, though the amount of suffering compressed within that short space of time made it appear to me of tenfold length. And now I yearned earnestly to see a familiar face—to hear a familiar voice.

"‘Let me but live to grasp one dear hand!’ I cried mentally. ‘Let me not die and make no sign to any that I love.’

"With the first dawn of daylight I began to count anxiously the hours that must elapse before there could be any probability of the arrival of my relations, and became so restless and feverish under the excitement of waiting their appearance, that as morning advanced my illness increased,

and when at length this painful agitation had spent itself, it left me so exhausted that on the actual arrival of my friends I was scarcely conscious of their presence, and when, shortly afterwards—according to a plan which they and my good physician had arranged—wrapped in blankets and placed in a sedan chair, I was slowly carried from the house a sojourn in which had so nearly proved fatal to me, and conveyed to a little villa near at hand, where in a quiet apartment, a cool, fresh bed received my fevered frame, although I felt the reviving influence of the salutary change, I was conscious of little else, and soon lost even that faint sense of the present, falling into a sleep the result either of the fatigue I had undergone or of some opiate administered to me, from which I did not awake till towards evening. But when at length my eyes unclosed, it was indeed delightful to find that their gaze rested on a familiar and beloved countenance that was now tenderly bending over me. And I was no more left to the tender mercies of strangers; this dear relation, the sight of whose kind face seemed to

me as a glimpse of heavenly sunshine, remained with me through the whole term of a dreadful illness that ensued, consequent on the terrors through which I had passed, when for many weeks I lay between life and death, and with my reason hovering on a fearful brink, the consciousness of which caused me extreme agony. I believe, indeed, that but for the solace and support of this kindly companionship, my mind would have irrecoverably given way under the misery that assailed me in the perpetually recurring thought of the horror I had endured. So slight at this time was the power to exercise my reason, that a sound, a look startling me, were often sufficient to awaken my wildest fears, and to cause a sharp thrill of anguish to pass through my whole frame. I was still, however, prohibited from speaking of that dreadful night, under the mistaken notion of guarding me from dangerous excitement; but at length feeling that I could no longer bear this unnatural restraint, I one day insisted on my physican's allowing me to relate to him the history of my terrible experience, as-

sureing him, I felt that by thus disburthening my mind I should have a far better chance of recovery, than by persisting in the silence he enjoined. My principal motive, however, for demanding to make this narration was my anxiety that the treachery of the wicked nurse should not go unpunished—that so dangerous a wretch should not be permitted to be at large; and hitherto I had received only evasive replies to my occasional enquiries concerning her.

“ When my doctor had at last attentively listened to my circumstantial detail of the peril through which I had passed, he was obviously impressed with the *reality* of the danger to which I had been exposed. He cross-questioned me, however, with no little ingenuity, but my testimony was always the same; and at the conclusion of his investigation, he assured me that he was now fully convinced I had not been deluded by imaginary terrors, as he acknowledged he had almost believed to be the case, till the sight of the written paper I had given him, with my account of its having been so unwarrantably snatched from me,

had somewhat shaken that opinion, and the prevarication of the nurse, whom he afterwards questioned on the subject, had, he owned, still further undermined it. She had at first, he said, denied all knowledge of my having written anything whatever; but, on his showing her the paper, had become visibly confused, admitting then that she had seen me write it; and on his demanding why she had presumed to take it from me, answered, it was because she knew the person whom I wished to summon was a poor sickly creature, totally unfit for a night watcher. This statement was, as I told him, utterly false, nor, indeed, had this woman any knowledge whatever of the servant in question. He was scarcely astonished at hearing this, and proceeded to tell me that the night on which he had been summoned to me, the nurse had previously come to his house at so late an hour that he had sometime retired to rest, and was much surprised at being disturbed by her, as he had left me in the evening going on perfectly well. She told him that she had been sent by me to tell him that I

needed a sleeping-draught, as I was somewhat restless, although continuing better, and by no means requiring to see him. In compliance with my supposed request, he said, he sent by her a very small portion of a harmless narcotic that he kept at hand, saying simply that she might at once give it to me, but adding not one word, as she had affirmed he had, of his having unbounded confidence in her care of a patient. He then went on to say, that subsequently, on being hastily summoned to visit me, and informed that I was in a high state of delirium, he was greatly astonished; and although, on his arrival, he found that the rapid beating of my pulse certainly indicated a considerable amount of fever, and my state of agonised excitement appeared in some degree to confirm the report that had been made to him of my condition; he nevertheless, hearing my charge against the nurse, was unfavourably struck by the suspicious circumstance of her hurried and unbidden departure from my chamber directly he entered it; and also by the extreme agitation she betrayed, when presently

afterwards, in another apartment, he questioned her concerning me. Believing that she had terrified me by some undue exercise of authority, he had, he said, at once taken upon himself the responsibility of summarily dismissing her from my service, and ordering that she should, on no pretence whatever, again be allowed to enter my presence; although the landlady insisted on permitting her to remain in the house during the night. He had been most indignant, he added, when, on the following morning, he found that his command had been disregarded and that I had been alarmed by the woman's appearance in my chamber.

“He had since, as he informed me, had more than one interview with her, when her agitation had of itself been sufficient to cause grave suspicion against her; and on his again closely questioning her as to the occasion of the terror in which he found me on the night he had been so unexpectedly summoned to my bed-side, the causes she had assigned for it were so improbable and so contradictory, that he had been thoroughly

convinced of the complete falsehood of her statements; and now that he had at last listened to my own account of that terrible night and of the incidents preceding it, he could no longer, he said, have any doubt of her guilty purpose. Indeed, how was it possible?" cried Miss Dale. "Let us note the most striking circumstances of the case. In the first instance the sight of the valuables contained in my box without doubt at once excited her cupidity, and having determined to possess herself of them, how to escape detection, became, we may take for granted, her next consideration. The contemplated arrival of my relations perhaps hastened her plans; and we have seen that on the night preceding their expected presence she succeeded in her determination that none should share her watch. The sleeping draught, for which in my name she had applied, was, we must conjecture, intended to serve the purpose of putting me in a state in which I should be unable to resist an act of violence; and when this failed in effect, the second potion offered was no doubt designed suc-

cessfully to still me. In what followed that baffled attempt there can be no question of her guilty intent, and if she had achieved her terrible project, and afterwards possessed herself of my valuables, it is possible that she might have escaped suspicion. She would doubtless have coined some plausible story of my sudden and natural death, which, considering my late dangerous state of illness, might not have been difficult to believe, while her robbery would probably have remained undetected from the circumstance of there being no one to prove what was in my possession when I entered the house."

"These appalling and too probable suppositions make my blood run cold with horror," exclaimed Mrs. Gilbert. "Surely the dreadful creature was not allowed to go unpunished?"

"Not intentionally. After due consultation with my friends a warrant for her apprehension was about to be applied for, when it was discovered that she had eluded justice by embarking in an emigrant ship bound for Australia,

and that had already sailed from a neighbouring sea-port. But with an accusing conscience she will not escape retribution."

"It is altogether a most terrible history," said Mrs. Gilbert, "and I fear that your recital of it must have revived some agonizing tremors."

"I confess I am glad that to-night I shall not be alone," answered Miss Dale. "I am glad you will be with me, dear Margaret."

CHAPTER VII.

THE sun was shining out with splendour from among heavy clouds in the afternoon of the following day, and the two friends, who had loitered over a late breakfast, and since become somewhat heedless of the lapse of time, sat deep in talk, when Mr. Surrey walked in, saying that he had come to escort Mrs. Gilbert home.

Miss Dale playfully rallied him on his politeness.

“Is it such a wonderful thing?” he said; “now that I am giving up my hermit life I must make myself useful in civilized society. I shall attend you on your sketching excursions;—I shall carry the camp-chair;—I shall take charge of the portfolio.”

Miss Dale smiled.

"And your little favorite shall accompany us," he continued; "we shall not then fall into discourse that is too grave or too sad."

"Yet there is in her a touch almost of sadness at times," said Miss Dale.

"True, but it quickly passes; she is quite the child still. And here she comes!" he exclaimed, seeing Rhoda at that moment running up the garden path. "Ah, you little trespasser! What do you do here?" he shouted. "Have you no terror of the spring guns and steel traps set on these premises?"

"It is you that are caught in the trap," cried she; "but open the door and let me come in."

"Ah, there are your sisters, blooming as roses," he exclaimed, as admitting his little friend he perceived the two elder girls' faces peeping above the garden hedge, and he ran forward to open the wicket.

"We knew we should find you here!" cried Emily and Fanny in a breath. But just then a heavy cloud broke, and as the rain came sud-

denly down, seizing a hand of each, he laughingly raced with them into the house.

Miss Dale was delighted to see her young friends; she had began to fear that they were forgetting the way to the Briars, she told them.

"Oh, no!" cried Emily; "but we have lately been rather busy at home."

"They are industrious girls," said Mrs. Gilbert. "What do you think of their bonnets and mantles to-day, which I really must tell you are of their own handy-work."

"Yes, we have no money now to spare for milliners," explained Emily, "and so we follow the craft ourselves, you see, and a very pleasant occupation, I assure you, we find it."

"They are dear clever creatures! They can do all useful things!" cried Miss Dale.

"And ornamental, you should add, in the present instance surely," said Mr. Surrey. "Can anything be more becoming than this new winter attire?"

"No, indeed, with this velvet of dark green about them they are perfect moss roses. But

now, dear girls, you must take off these same pretty mantles and bonnets; there is no chance of the weather clearing for some time to come, so there is nothing for all of you to do but to resign yourselves to the detention, and to come into the next room and take luncheon with me, if you can be content with such frugal fare as Dinah, my caterer, may be able to supply."

"We are so hungry after our long walk that we shall be sure to do justice to your good cheer," said Emily, taking off her bonnet and smoothing down her rich brown hair, which the rough wind had somewhat disarranged.

"What a fine blooming creature she is," thought Mr. Surrey, silently observing her.

"Are you dreaming? Will you come this way to luncheon," said Miss Dale presently, lightly touching him on the arm and leading the way into her little dining room.

"Why are you looking so grave!" he asked as he seated himself at the table beside her.

"Am I looking grave? Well, then I suppose

it is owing to the grave thought which just now entered my mind."

"May one hear it?"

"Certainly not."

"Suppose I should guess it."

"I defy you to do so."

"And yet I could at this moment whisper it into your ear; shall I do so?"

"No, no, I eschew whispering. And pray make yourself useful. See Fanny is waiting for a slice of the brown loaf before you."

"And now that the young lady is supplied," said Mr. Surrey, "and your other guests are all, as I perceive, served, I must take care of you. What will you have?"

"Pray take care of yourself first."

"I will take care of both; we will divide this plate of biscuits, and share this jar of marmalade between us."

"With all my heart: it will remind me of the old times."

"Which you have almost forgotten?"

"Have I, indeed?" enquired Miss Dale.

"I can scarcely answer that question while you so pertinaciously fix your eyes on that flying dragon or monstrous bird wrought in the damask table cloth."

"What a curious manufacture it is! and what grotesque and uncouth objects are introduced into it!" observed Miss Dale.

"They serve a convenient purpose now at least," said Mr. Surrey.

"And pray what may that be?"

"To give an evasive turn to the conversation between two persons, one of whom is mysteriously serious, and the other unpardonably inquisitive," replied Mr. Surrey.

"I think something or other had better serve the convenient purpose of general conversation just now," said Miss Dale.

"You are quite right. What a fortunate chance this is for us," he added, in a louder tone; "how cosy and pleasant we all are, and how we do enjoy the biscuits and marmalade!"

"And the brown bread and butter!" cried the girls.

"And the poached eggs!" said Mrs. Gilbert.

"I am persuaded that we shall very often be coming this way when the clouds appear threatening; we shall find ourselves near a certain prickly hedge just as the first drops begin to fall," said Mr. Surrey.

"Then you will make me wish for many a prolonged shower," answered Miss Dale.

"Oh, what a burst of sunshine! I am sure there must be a rainbow!" exclaimed Emily, as a bright gleam suddenly lighted up the little apartment.

"Yes, there is the perfect arch—how very beautiful!" said Miss Dale, going towards the window, whither they all followed her.

"This is the clearing shower, I am sure," said Mrs. Gilbert, and she and the elder girls now prepared for departure, chatting with Miss Dale the while.

"Ah!" cried Rhoda mournfully, still standing before the window and looking up at the sky, "the beautiful rainbow has all melted away!"

"Come, child, don't stand idling there, but get your bonnet on," said Fanny sharply.

But Rhoda did not move.

"Come, little loiterer," cried Mr. Surrey, putting his hands on the child's shoulders, and gently turning her face towards him, "come, no more sky-gazing. But what is this I see?" he added softly, "tears, tears trembling under those downcast lids? What a sensitive little being it is!"

"Don't tell," whispered Rhoda, brushing away the glistening drops; "it was so beautiful—I couldn't help it. Don't tell."

Mr. Surrey pushed aside the waving hair that fell over her brow, and looked with kind earnestness into her tearful eyes.

"What is this whispering about between you and my little sister?" said Emily, coming towards them. "Mamma is quite ready to go."

"Look at these disordered locks!" exclaimed Mr. Surrey, passing his hand through Rhoda's abundant hair; "did you ever see such an intricate maze as there is here?"

"Oh, you have been giving the little lady a lecture on untidiness, I suppose; but really I must take her part; these tangled tresses were

smooth and shining enough till they were so roughly treated by the boisterous wind."

"Oh! that is it."

"Yes, and here is her bonnet; we shall tuck the disordered locks snugly under it, and she will look quite a tidy little fairy," said her sister, tying the strings and smiling fondly on Rhoda.

A bright glance rested on Emily.

"What grace lies in the simplest act of spontaneous kindness," thought Mr. Surrey.

"You are sunning yourself," said a low voice near him; he turned round, Miss Dale had approached.

"Looking on sunshine, nothing more; I stand on the outer circle of the gracious radiance; light without warmth, now as ever, is all that reaches me."

Miss Dale made a smiling gesture of dissent.

"You need not look so incredulous," he said, "I would at once give you a lecture on that proneness of yours to disbelieve everything of this sort which I say, but I see my good cousin is im-

patient to be gone, and the sunshine, you perceive, has already flitted away from us," he added, glancing towards Emily, who was at the further end of the room tying on her cloak.

There was a fine, clear sky now, and Mrs. Gilbert, anxious to take advantage of it, began to hasten the adieus.

"Good bye, dear Miss Dale," cried Emily, "we have had a charming hour here."

"A very charming hour," said Mr. Surrey, "and which, according to the vulgar computation of time, has contained at the very least a hundred and twenty minutes, but we have nothing to do with such common-place reckoning."

"To be sure not," responded Emily, "what need to count the moments when they fly so pleasantly!"

"There is all the more need to count them then, lest we should lose too many," observed Fanny, gravely.

"Lose them!" exclaimed her sister, "I don't call enjoyment loss, do you, Mr. Surrey?"

"On the contrary I consider it great gain."

“If we could learn anything by it,” persisted Fanny.

“If we can learn to be happy, we can learn nothing better, I think,” cried Emily.

“Ah! you are a charming philosopher! you shall teach us all!” exclaimed Mr. Surrey; “you and I,” he continued, as taking leave, he shook hands with Miss Dale, “you and I will gladly sit at her feet.”

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS DALE stood under her rustic porch as the little party walked down the garden path and passed through the open wicket; Mr. Surrey was about to close it when his glance fell on the sloping flower-border beneath the sweet-briar hedge, and while his companions hastened onwards, he loitered a moment, then re-entered the garden, and stooping over the flower-bed plucked some newly-opened violets; approaching Miss Dale he placed the little bouquet in her hand, then drew from it a few of the blossoms and smilingly inhaling their fragrance, without a word he departed.

Miss Dale returned to the painting room; she

sat again at her easel, and from time to time threw a tint here, a shade there, into the half-finished landscape ; but her work only slowly advanced, for the painting brush was often cast aside and not unfrequently the slender hands lay idly folded together. She had placed the violets in her girdle and their perfume perhaps called up some sad and tender memory, for a glance which swam in tears was often turned towards them ; suddenly however a crimson blush stained her cheek, and hastily removing the violets she placed them between the leaves of an open volume that lay beside her, crushing the fragrant blossoms as with an impetuous movement she firmly closed the book. Returning to her picture she applied herself to it with renewed energy till the waning day compelled her to desist ; she rose then and went towards the window. The wind had lulled and the evening was exquisitely beautiful ; there were yet a few crimson streaks lingering in the west, and one fair star was gleaming high in the heavens. " I must escape from this dull prison," thought Miss Dale, as she

glanced round her apartment that was darkening in the twilight, and now that her task could no longer be pursued became conscious of fatigue; and that she needed rest—refreshment—and these she should find in the open atmosphere, in the soothing influence of the fading sky, in the shadows creeping over the fields; even in the physical effort which a prolonged walk would call forth there would be rest—rest for the brain. With her servant in attendance she presently set out on her late stroll, and the two were soon in the quiet lane, with the fair star brightening in the deepening twilight; and the lulled wind creeping among the leafless branches.

“Dinah,” said Miss Dale, after having for a little while walked on in silence, “does it ever seem to you that you hear the sound of the far-off sea as you are passing along the lanes and fields here?”

“O, often and often, ma’am! and though I know it is more than a hundred miles off I feel sometimes as if it were rolling over the soft sands at my very feet.”

“Does it make you sad?”

“It makes me happy rather than sad, ma'am, for it takes me back to the old time when I was a little child on the sea shore, watching my father's fishing-boat, as it rocked and tumbled among the waves and the white spray. And I often think how strange it is that just the sound of the wind among the trees, for I know it is not really the noise of the sea that comes here, should call up such a sight as that; and show me, too, our poor cot on the beach with its merry faces at the door; and bring to mind besides many and many a thing that mayhap for years and years I have not given a thought to; for the words of my dead mother come back to me then, and the voices of my little brothers and sisters that are lying in the church-yard; and it is none of their rude ways or rough sayings that I seem to hear, but only their gentle and loving ones.”

“With what a gracious voice nature speaks even to the humblest of her favoured children,” thought Miss Dale; “no matter though to us

they may seem ignorant—uncultivated, and that so we are content to leave them;—they have better teaching than we can give.”

“And, Dinah,” asked she, “do you never wish to see again your early home?”

“O! ma’am, it is to be able to return there at last that I have been content through years and years to toil far away: it is there I hope to die.”

“And I also,” thought Miss Dale; “I also have had this one strong wish to rest at last in my early home; to see again the glittering sea roll on the smooth beach; the sea-gull dip its white pinion in the wave; the stately ship pass on with a motion smooth as the swan’s on an inland lake; while the fisher’s boat with fluttering sail rocks lightly on the troubled tide. Yes, I also have had this wish, but it has long subsided, I scarce know why: it matters little to me now on what scene my eyes at last shall close. I have learned to love even these tame fields, apart too from the verdure and bloom with which summer decks them; and in the chill severe aspect they

now wear I can recognize a charm. In this dim light," she continued, as emerging from the lane she approached the barren common, "yonder wide and silent waste stretched out beneath the moonless sky is not without a touch of solemn beauty; there is that in its aspect which accords well with a heart chastened by sadness, and the chilling air that sweeps over it harmonizes with the sombre scene. Here are no discords—all is peace—chill and dreary peace," and folding her shawl more closely round her, Miss Dale pursued her way across the desolate plain. After awhile, reaching a more sheltered spot, she came to a solitary cottage with a small patch of garden-ground before it, and her knock for admittance at the door of this humble abode was presently answered by a decent old woman, who, in the dim light, stared in some surprise at her late visitor.

"Well, my good dame," said Miss Dale, "I am come to know whether your rooms are prepared according to my direction, for I believe your lodger will be here in the course of to-morrow."

"Dear heart!" exclaimed the old woman, "is

it you, Miss Dale, at this late time of day? There is hardly light enough for me to see, but sure it is your pleasant voice."

"Yes, my good Mrs. Gurney; and are you quite in readiness for your lodger?"

"Why, as good luck would have it," answered the old woman, "I am, for the lady's come."

"Come! Come already!" exclaimed Miss Dale.

"Yes, ma'am, not an hour ago."

"Let me in. And, Dinah, stay you here with this good woman," said Miss Dale, pointing towards a little sanded kitchen, the door of which stood open on one side of the narrow passage, while on the other she hastily entered the opposite apartment.

It was nearly dark there, for the narrow casement admitted little of the fading daylight, but Miss Dale could distinguish that a female figure was half reclining on a small couch placed against the wall, and as she recognized the outline of that graceful form there came to her heart a rush of tender memories.

“Jane, dear Jane!” she cried, springing forward, and folding her friend in a fervent embrace.

“O, Louisa, you alone of all the world have not forsaken me!”

“My poor Jane, and how could I forsake you?”

For a few moments they wept silently in each other's arms.

Recovering herself, Miss Dale placed her friend again on the couch, and seated herself beside her, but she still held one of her hands within both her own.

“Jane, Jane, why did not you tell me sooner of your trouble?”

“Alas! shame kept me silent.”

“That ought not to have been: you should have known me better.”

“Ah, Louisa! even you must despise one fallen as I am.”

“God forbid!” said Miss Dale, earnestly: “but now let us think only of what can cheer and comfort you. I hope you find all that you require here—I hope this little abode is not more humble than you expected.”

“It is too good—too good for me.”

“Nay, nay, but a little time hence, when the spring is come, I think you will really find it pleasant. The air here is deliciously pure, and there are lovely walks at hand: you and I will have many a stroll together.”

“O, Louisa, to think of the old times—the old happy times—it breaks my heart.”

“Courage, dear Jane! Do not uselessly look back: think of the present—of the future—think of the daily work that is before you.”

“Yes, indeed, I must do so: I have long had to give daily work for daily bread, and it has been good for me; but for this, in truth, I believe I should not have kept my senses.”

“And now in this quiet spot you will have fresh vigour for your task: the charming chapters will be more charming still.”

“Escape from the crowded, noisy city is indeed delightful: but it is your kindness, Louisa, that I already feel is giving me new life. Not yet, not yet,” she cried, covering her

face with her hands, as the old dame suddenly entered the room with a pair of lighted candles, and scarcely comprehending the remonstrance, proceeded to place them on the table.

“Oh! Louisa, what a wreck you will see,” she resumed, as they were again alone, and removing her hands, she turned her face full towards her friend.” “Look here,” she cried, “is there a trace left by which you can remember me?”

“Alas! there is, indeed, a change,” said Miss Dale, almost startled out of self-possession, as she marked the haggard lines which misery had ploughed in the once lovely and noble countenance.

“I knew you would be shocked. I have dreaded this moment, but I am glad it is over now,” said the poor lady. “But how leniently time has dealt with you, Louisa,” she continued, looking earnestly into her friend’s face; “here is the same dear countenance that memory has so often shown me. I should have known you anywhere. Ah! you have not had to weep ceaselessly

for a fatal error; you have not been pierced by the sharpness of the world's cruelty."

Miss Dale could but fold the afflicted one in her arms, and let their tears mingle.

"And now," said she, when their emotion had in some measure subsided, "now, dear Jane, you must need rest."

"I must work instead of take rest," answered her friend, "I have a paper for a magazine to finish before to-morrow."

"I must at once take my departure then," said Miss Dale, "in order to prevent disappointment to the numerous readers whom you so much delight."

"Ah! little know they with what an aching heart—with what a weary hand I administer to their entertainment, and yet it seems to me that something of this they must suspect—that they cannot but perceive the shadow that is for ever resting on the page."

"Assuredly they do perceive it," answered Miss Dale, "and therein lies the chief cause of your success; it is the living, suffering heart

photographed, if I may so express it, on the page of assumed fiction, which gives to your literary productions the moving interest—the deep pathos capable of arresting popular attention.”

“Ah!” cried the authoress, laying her hand on a pile of manuscript beside her, “what throes of sorrow and of shame have given birth to this!”

“And how nobly have they been sustained!” said Miss Dale; “and now farewell, Jane.”

“Farewell! God bless you! You have poured balm into my heart.”

And the friends parted.

The evening had now become nearly dark, and the way was lonely; Miss Dale, saddened by the painful interview she had had, fell into mournful reflection, and soon becoming heedless of the cold, and careless of the haste with which it would have been salutary to proceed, unconsciously slackened her pace. “Poor Jane!” thought she, “poor, poor, Jane! Alas! what anguish has she earned through one guilty step! But can it be right that this single lapse from

social virtue, so long repented of, should remain for ever unpardoned?—that the affection of her own child—the child she once loved so intensely, and of whom she dares not now trust herself to speak—should be irretrievably alienated from her; that no woman's heart should turn towards her with compassion—should reverence her noble toil, self-imposed that she may not eat of the bread of the wronged husband or of the base seducer? Is the one sin to be for ever remembered against her, and the penitence which led her to renounce it to pass unheeded?

“Was there no true heroism called into action when confessing her unsuspected guilt she fled voluntarily into misery and poverty, courageously investing herself with the badge of shame, while the self-righteous stood afar off and pointed at her!

“Is there no wounded spirit, no tortured heart speaking in the severe lines of that altered countenance, telling how harshly they who esteem themselves without sin have dealt with a fallen sister through her many years of repentant sorrow!

“O! my poor Jane! if less of rigour had been shewn towards you, indignant virtue had worn a diviner aspect!”

There was food enough for painful meditation while this theme occupied Miss Dale's mind; her step became slower still, and it was long before she reached the gate of her little garden, and then she became conscious that a cold shiver ran through her frame. She had before now seemed to stand on the brink of death from a lighter cause than exposure to the inclement air which she had this evening braved; and hastening within doors she endeavoured by various simple remedies to neutralize the ill effects of the chill she had received; but in this she could not succeed, and after a restless night the morning found her utterly unable to rise. It was possible, however, that, by yielding for a day or two to the discipline which she knew her disorder peremptorily required, her recovery might be effected; and desiring Dinah to admit no visitors, and to place books within reach of her couch, she prepared herself to endure with patience the

punishment her imprudence had brought, not, however, without many a lingering regret cast towards the deserted easel. The unfinished landscape haunted her mind.

"There should be more light," thought she, "thrown on the distant hill, a deeper shade cast on that bend of the river over which the drooping bough hangs; and it would be well to introduce a human figure in the foreground; the cattle pausing to drink in the still water do not convey enough of life to the scene."

A book was in her hand, but she found it impossible to fix her attention on it; the unfinished picture took the place of the printed page on which her eyes mechanically rested. She became feverish, restless, an impatient spirit was stealing over her and increasing her malady. Suddenly she heard a visitor making enquiry for her at the door of the house; she recognised the voice. Presently Dinah brought a message to her:—

"Mr. Surrey was much concerned to hear of her illness. Would Miss Dale like to see Mrs.

Gilbert or either of her daughters? He was sure they would gladly come if she wished it: he was waiting her answer in the breakfast-room."

"No, Miss Dale thanked him; it was better that she should be alone."

Another message:—"Should he be the bearer of a summons to her physician—to Doctor Bassett?"

"O! no, no, she was not ill enough to require to see him: in a day or two she hoped to be well again."

"And what has been the cause of this sudden illness?" enquired Mr. Surrey of Dinah.

"My mistress was out late yesterday evening, Sir, when it was very cold, and she was taken ill as soon as she got home."

"Out yesterday evening!" he exclaimed, "why the weather was piercing!"

"Will she never learn prudence," said he to himself, as turning to close the garden wicket he looked for a moment towards the curtained window

of the invalid's chamber, "Will she never learn prudence! There is sheer weakness in this neglect of the caution necessary to preserve health delicate as hers," and with an impatient gesture he hastened on his solitary walk towards the common.

CHAPTER IX.

“FAIR Emily, I want to employ your nimble fingers in my service,” said Mr. Surrey, with his hands full of papers, one day entering the room where Mrs. Gilbert and her daughters sat diligently working, “but no, I shall interrupt you, I perceive, I must prefer my request at some other time.”

“No, indeed!” cried Emily, laying down the piece of plain sewing that she had in hand, “no, indeed! I shall be delighted at once to do anything I can for you. What is it you want?”

“I want these sheets of manuscript to be stitched together, they are perpetually falling

apart now, and causing me all sorts of perplexity."

"To be sure they are, how could they do otherwise in that deplorable state; I shall put them all right. You will see how famously I shall arrange them."

"Take care, take care! you have got hold of the wrong page now; I must stand by to see that you commit no blunders."

"Ah! you are only watching to prevent my peeping into it."

"No, that is a supposition prompted merely by your guilty conscience; but now that you have roused my suspicion I shall certainly keep guard: those bright eyes are to dwell solely on the stitches, they are not to wander at all towards the hieroglyphics."

"Hieroglyphics indeed! well, at all events I can decipher them easily enough; listen now, 'Were there a complete harmony between the individual mind and society, it is plain that—'"

"I cannot allow this," interrupted Mr. Surrey covering the page with his hand, "I must apply

to Fanny. Fanny has a more tender conscience. Fanny will sew the pages together without looking at a word."

"No, indeed, sir," cried Emily playfully, "I shall not give up my task to anyone; I began it, and I shall finish it. Take care now, or between us the manuscript will get torn."

"You are a very charming, but a very self-willed young lady. Well, I am at your mercy."

"To be sure you are; and now I will be generous, I promise not to read a single line."

"That is right, and now I will go back to my own territory."

"No, no, pray stay where you are!"

"But what can I do here?"

"Oh, I can very soon settle that point for you; you can read to us, talk to us, listen to us."

"How absurdly you speak, Emily, as if anything we may say can be worth Mr. Surrey's listening to," cried Fanny.

"And why not, gracious lady?" said he.

Mrs. Gilbert laughed: "I fear Fanny just at this moment hardly deserves the epithet you bestow on her, although I daresay it is not her intention to be ungracious."

"I like people to talk common sense; as to my being gracious or ungracious I don't care a straw about it," said Fanny.

"But this is not quite as it should be, my pretty Fanny."

"Oh, pray, Mr. Surrey, don't think it necessary to garnish your reproof with a complimentary phrase. I am not like Emily, I dislike flattery."

"And I should be sorry to bestow it on either of you."

"And I am sure," said Emily, "I don't care for flattery, but Fanny and I disagree in our opinion of what it really is. Saying an agreeable thing to please another, provided it be true is not what I call flattery, but Fanny does, and so this is a subject on which we never accord."

"Then it were wise not to discuss it," ob-

served Mr. Surrey. "Ah, what a little truant you are," he cried turning towards Rhoda; "you have not been near me all the morning: I do believe the German lesson was altogether forgotten."

"No, no," said Mrs. Gilbert, "but we had so much work to get through that even the help of our little Rhoda was required. We are preparing things to send out to Edmund, and we have just heard that the ship which is to convey them will sail a month earlier than we expected; that is the cause of our extraordinary diligence just now."

"And I have been interrupting you, and taking up Emily's valuable time with my tiresome manuscript. How good natured you have been not to turn me out of the room! I am sure I have deserved punishment."

"I will tell you in what way we shall inflict it," cried Emily, "we shall not let you out now you are here; no, even though the manuscript is now all nicely stitched; you shall not go off with it, but here you shall remain and read it to us."

“No, no, but I will read something that you will like much better. Here, I see, is a charming novel,” he said, taking up a volume from the table; and much to the delight of the little party he proceeded to read it aloud.

It was considerably past the usual time for his morning walk when at length laying down the book, amidst the hearty thanks of his listeners, he said that he must now start off on a country ramble.

“You don’t mean to leave the manuscript behind you?” said Emily.

“No, indeed,” answered Mr. Surrey, receiving his papers from her hand, “and I must thank you very much for having fastened all these pages so closely together. Now,” and he smiled on her brightly, “now the manuscript is precious.”

She blushed a little. “It is ready, I hope, to send to the printer.”

“To the printer, indeed! Do you think I shall part with it?” and with an expressive glance he raised to his lips the little ribbon knot with which she had tied it.

She shook her head at him, and laughed gaily, but at the same moment the color on her cheeks deepened.

“She grows more charming every day,” thought Mr. Surrey, as he locked the manuscript in his desk, “and yet there is a something wanting to complete the fascination—some soft attraction. What can it be? The touch of love, perhaps. She is full of bewitching gaiety, but yet she is less interesting than the sensitive child Rhoda, in whom I can perceive the germ of a fine intellect, and within whose little bosom there lies already an intense depth of tenderness. I could take infinite pleasure in watching the development of this precious bud. How immeasurable must be a father’s love for a child in anywise like this dear little one! How arid is the life that has no sweet domestic ties! Philosophy is impotent to reconcile us to their absence. How unwise has been my course! But there is sheer weakness in this vain regret now;” and resolutely turning his mind from the subject, thoughts, foreign to this somewhat pensive soliloquy,

shortly afterwards occupied Mr. Surrey's mind as he paced to and fro over a sunny portion of the heath: he was contemplating the possibility of separating light from darkness—of sifting truth from falsehood—for this one object he would labour in his generation—and a train of subtle reason suggested itself to his mind, abstracting his attention from all outward things and making him insensible to the lapse of time. It was long past the usual hour of his return before he had remarked how far the day had advanced, and he then began with rapid steps to bend his way homewards, and in order to lessen the distance, on quitting the heath he turned into a path that led to the town across some sequestered fields. He had passed the first of these when he found his way obstructed by a gate which was fastened, and at the same moment he observed a lady on the other side, who was endeavouring to open it; he stepped forward to assist her, and as she turned to thank him for his courtesy, he was struck by the depth of sad thoughtfulness which her countenance expressed,

no less than by the tone of her voice, which was low and full. "Surely," thought he, as turning from her he proceeded on his solitary way, "this woman has struggled bravely with heavy sorrow. There was deep feeling, there was high thought in the expression of those large mournful eyes. Her voice, too, was strangely harmonious. Who can this stranger be? I have seen her somewhere in years gone by."

A few days afterwards, as he stood at the door of Miss Dale's house, making enquiry of Dinah respecting the health of her mistress, this same lady, to his surprise, passed him on the threshold, gracefully acknowledging his silent bow. There was the same mournful glance, the same thoughtful expression of the brow. He could not refrain from enquiring who this stranger was.

"It is Mrs. Copeland, sir," answered Dinah.

The name suddenly recalled to him a painful rumour he had heard concerning one that an earlier recollection brought to his mind as the centre of attraction to a brilliant circle into

which, on some now forgotten occasion, he had been introduced by a college friend.

Dinah continued:

"She is a friend of my mistress's, who lodges in the little cottage close to the common."

"Is Miss Dale able to receive visitors," he enquired.

"She has not been well enough to see anyone, sir, except Mrs. Copeland."

"She is not able to paint now?"

"Oh, sir, she has been sitting up in her bed and working at a picture, but it was too much for her—it made her very ill."

"She can amuse herself with a book, perhaps; give her this," said Mr. Surrey, taking a small volume from his pocket.

"And any message with it, sir?"

"No—yet stay," and he took out his pencil, and wrote a few kindly words on the back of his card. "Give Miss Dale this, if you please."

CHAPTER X.

WOODRIDGE was a tolerably social little town, and among its small visiting population evening entertainments not unfrequently occurred. Owing to various untoward circumstances it was, however, long since one of these assemblages had been held at the Gilberts; but at length their invitations had been issued, and a party at their house was about to take place. As Emily sat beside Mr. Surrey at the dinner table a few hours before the intended festivity, she began to talk of the number of guests expected, and of the amusements for them that had been planned.

“I shall take a peep at your gay doings in the course of the evening,” he said.

“Take a peep indeed! What can you mean?”

“I know you will be charitable enough to let me have a quiet cup of tea in my little *sanctum*. I have some writing in hand that I wish to get through to-night.”

“That is really too bad! Mamma, did you ever hear anything like it?”

“I think I remember something like it, my dear. Ah! William,” continued Mrs. Gilbert, turning to Mr. Surrey with a smile, “this is one of the caprices you and I used to have many a discussion about of old.”

“Do not call it a caprice. I dislike a formal party; I cannot add one iota to the amusement of it, and therefore why should I thrust myself where I should only be in the way?”

“But our visitors will be so disappointed,” urged Emily.

“That can hardly be, since I have not even the honour of their acquaintance.”

“Oh, yes, you do know some of them; and I assure you Charlotte Harris has quite looked forward to this evening for the sake of meeting

you. I never see her but she asks a hundred questions about you."

"There, William!" exclaimed Mr. Gilbert; "surely you will not disappoint a young lady who asks a hundred questions about you."

"When I go to practise with her," said Fanny, "she is talking about you more than half the time."

"And," said Andrew, "she met me out walking the other day, and enquired how it was that I was not accompanied by our 'talented guest.'"

"And yesterday," cried Rhoda, "when she gave me those beautiful double violets, she said, 'Let the interesting student inhale their perfume,' and that is why I set them in a vase on your writing table."

"Ha! ha! ha!" shouted Mr. Gilbert, and the laugh became general.

"I cry you mercy, my good friends," said Mr. Surrey; "I doubt not you have good cause for your mirth, but it is a little hard for such a harmless being as I am to be the butt of it."

"Harmless, indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Gilbert,

“when we have just been given to understand what havoc you have committed—how you have pierced a young lady’s heart through and through.”

“Nay, I leave such prowess as that to my friend Andrew here.”

“Poor dear Edmund was the one to pierce hearts,” said Emily; “he was for ever making conquests, and without trying to do so.”

“The reason of his success, probably,” observed Mr. Surrey.

“Oh, he had such merry winning ways!”

Mr. Gilbert looked disturbed, as he always did when his absent son was mentioned; and Mrs. Gilbert, anxious to turn the conversation into a new channel, made some trifling remark on another subject. Emily took the hint, and talked no more of poor Edmund, and when after a somewhat long pause Mr. Surrey addressed an observation to her, looking at her as he spoke, he saw tears swimming in her eyes.

“She is a sweet affectionate creature,” thought he, and perhaps his looks were no less expressive

than words would have been, for in spite of her emotion Emily blushed as she met his glance. "And how charming that blush is," thought he again.

Disguising her confusion with a smile, she said:

"You don't really intend to play Diogenes in his tub to-night?"

"I am not quite so churlish. When the first notes of a certain air reach me," said he, turning to Fanny, "I shall not be able to resist the temptation of creeping out of the tub."

"Then positively the evening must begin with that very air."

"No, no; that I absolutely prohibit. When there has been a little dancing, and a little singing, and a little playing at German forfeits, then will be the time for Fanny's charming music; and then I shall quietly find my place among you as a listener, and afterwards I shall play my part very effectively among the jellies, and trifles, and tarts. And now I think we have very pleasantly settled the matter."

A little later Mr. Surrey sat in his study endeavouring to fix his thoughts on the page of manuscript before him. There was a gentle knock at his door, and Rhoda smilingly entered with a cup of tea, and a plate of biscuits.

"You beneficent little fairy!" he exclaimed, laying down his pen, and looking up with the brightest smile, "Ah! and my favourite biscuits"

"Emily said you would like them."

"Well, between you all, you will certainly contrive to spoil me for a desolate life. What shall I do when I go away from you, Rhoda?"

"Come back again to us as soon as ever you can."

"No, my little friend; I must be a solitary wanderer on the face of the earth. This sweet nest of home is not for me."

"You can build a nest for yourself," said Rhoda.

"And what bird of the air wants a nest all to himself?"

"The bird takes a mate," said she, "and then he builds the nest."

"But I have no mate."

"Can't you find one? Would you like a wild one of the woods, or a tame one, used to a cage?"

"The wild one would fly away from me, I am afraid; and I do think I should fly away from the tame one. But don't run away; I want to look at you. What an airy little sylph you seem in that gossamer robe, and with the careless curls waving about!"

"Emily dressed me, but Fanny says I don't look tidy enough."

"Fanny is a little too precise."

"But she always looks very nice."

"Yes; very nice."

"But she does not look like Emily?"

"No, she does not look like Emily."

"And I like Emily's look the best. Don't you?"

"Come, come, little lady; I must not have you playing the critic on your pretty sisters. And I do think I must not keep you here any longer; they will be wanting you in the drawing room."

“Emily says you must not forget to listen for Fanny’s music; and that you must come directly you hear it,” said Rhoda.

“No, no, I shall not forget,” and Rhoda skipped out of the room.

Mr. Surrey, pen in hand, was presently bending over a pile of manuscript, carefully examining it page by page, here inserting a word, there erasing one, and occasionally filling up the broad, blank margin with a comment or note, as some new idea suggested itself to his mind. Thus occupied, time passed unheeded, and the promised music was unheard. But while thus absorbed, his attention was suddenly attracted by a slight noise, and he became aware that his door was being softly opened on the outside, and presently there was the sound of light footsteps, and the rustle of silken garments, as of some one rapidly retreating, and then stole to his ear the well-nown notes of a plaintive melody. For some moments he listened to it with pleased attention, and then hastily gathering up his papers, and carefully locking them in his desk, he cheerfully

obeyed the summons, and proceeded at once to the drawing-room. Emily smiled gaily as he entered, and blushed, he thought, slightly. It seemed to him that she had never appeared to greater advantage: her rich brown hair smoothly parted on the forehead was gathered up in a careless knot at the back of the head, leaving bare the small, well-turned ear, and the round, blooming cheek; and her figure looked more striking than usual in the unornamented gown of pale blue silk, which left partially uncovered her fine neck and arms, unencumbered by broach or bracelet; her only decoration being a large bunch of violets, which she wore in her bosom. There were many young ladies present, and among them not a few with a fair share of personal attraction, but not one with a tithe of Emily's claim to admiration; at least so thought Mr. Surrey, as his glance rested on her, and he called to mind with surprise that till lately he had been insensible to her beauty. How handsome she looked now, as her eye and cheek brightened at his approach! How easy and

graceful was her attitude! How simple, yet tasteful, her dress! But who was that handsome man so earnestly speaking to her, and so obviously regarding her with fascinated attention? A favoured admirer, no doubt. Well, Mr. Surrey would not interrupt their discourse, and so mar the pleasure which they were enjoying; and he turned towards the further end of the room and there seated himself. The buzz of lively conversation was going on around him, marring the effect of Fanny's music, and he was beginning to feel his position irksome, and to regret that he had quitted his quiet study, when Emily advanced towards him, and laying her hand lightly on his arm, "Come," she said, "come let us see whether papa is able to amuse himself; whether he can make up his whist party."

The proposal was simple enough, but her manner was flurried, and her cheeks were dyed crimson. The same gentleman who had been conversing with her when first Mr. Surrey entered the room, and who was still beside her, now stepping forward, said,—

"I am to understand, then, that Miss Gilbert denies my request?"

"Yes," she answered, scarcely lifting her eyes towards him, "yes, I must beg you to excuse me."

He bowed and withdrew.

"May I ask who was your rejected petitioner?" enquired Mr. Surrey, as Emily and he were crossing the room together.

"The new rector of Holywell, Mr. Sandham," she replied.

"Oh!"

"Miss Dale, as you may remember, was speaking of him one day as wishing the ladies of his acquaintance to assist in some of his parish duty."

"And he wants now, I suppose, to enlist you as a sister of charity, unconscious that you are already one of the order."

"I!" exclaimed Emily.

"Yes, you."

"I really don't understand you."

"That is just as it should be; humility is a grace."

"You are quite enigmatical to-night, Mr. Surrey."

"Am I, fair Emily? But where are the whist players?"

"In that snug corner; don't you see them? They are now waiting to make up another rubber."

"Ah! Surrey," exclaimed Mr. Gilbert, as they drew near the table, "you are come just in time. Sit down, take a hand."

"No, excuse me."

"What, you won't play? Then we must give up our game."

"Would you rather not play, Mr. Surrey?" asked Emily.

"Much rather not."

"Papa enjoys a rubber so much."

"He can easily make it up, I imagine."

"No, indeed, for Doctor Bassett has been called away."

"Emily, my love," said Mr. Gilbert, looking towards Mr. Sandham, "I suppose our reverend friend yonder could not be persuaded to take a hand."

"Oh! no, papa, I am quite sure not."

"Well, then, there is no help for it; the game must be at an end."

"No, no, let me play, I will do my best," cried Emily.

"My dear," answered her father, "it is hardly fair to take you from your cheerful young companions to sit down with us grave old people." But he was obviously well pleased when Emily took her place opposite to him at the card table.

"Are you not a sister of charity?" whispered Mr. Surrey as he leaned over the back of Emily's chair.

She turned her bright face towards him:—

"Oh, is that what you meant?"

Mr. Gilbert called her attention to the game; but presently, still finding Mr. Surrey leaning over her chair, she turned to him again, saying,

"Do you know who that young lady is talking to Rhoda?"

"No; is she in any way remarkable?"

"Give her these," she whispered, with an arch

smile, pulling some of the violets from her bosom, "give her these."

"Do you think you have chosen a trustworthy messenger?" said Mr. Surrey, taking them from her hand, and carefully secreting them as he walked away.

"Oh, Mr. Surrey," cried Rhoda, as he approached, "I am so glad you are come! Will you persuade Miss Charlotte Harris to sing her manuscript song of the Lady and the Poet?"

But Miss Charlotte Harris was not a young lady to be persuaded into a performance without a large pre-payment of compliment; and Mr. Surrey's patience was nearly exhausted before she rose affectedly and allowed him to lead her to the piano. But when there the manuscript, which she said had been given to her by the 'interesting recluse of the Briars,' was not to be found, and Miss Charlotte had the opportunity of playing off additional airs and graces while it was being searched for; when at length the music was placed before her it was in a strangely crumpled condition, which Rhoda ac-

counted for by saying that Mr. Sandham had had it in his hand, rolling and rumpling it while he was thinking of something else, as she supposed.

“Oh yes, thinking of your sister Emily, of course,” said the young lady, somewhat pettishly.

“So it is Miss Gilbert who has to answer for this damage,” said Mr. Surrey, unrolling the piece of music, and vainly endeavouring to smooth it, “I suggest for her punishment that you sing the song now while she is too much occupied to listen to it.”

Miss Harris acquiesced with a bewitching smile, and placing her white fingers on the keys, drew up her slender throat, threw back her little head, and forthwith warbled, and warbled very charmingly,

Strayed a lady and a poet,
On a terrace bright with flowers,
Roll'd beneath the shining river,
Rose above the castle towers.
And the lady gay discoursing,
And the poet mute the while,
Love of her, she thought, enthralled him,
And she smiled a scornful smile.

But the poet, he was musing
Of the river as it strayed,
Of the green leaves as they quivered
Now in light, and now in shade.
While as one entranced with rapture,
As the lady spake he stood,
He in truth enchanted listened
To the linnet in the wood.

“Delightful!” cried Mr. Surrey; “with that very sweet voice, and that soft murmuring accompaniment one seems almost to hear the river and the bird.”

“How sentimental you all seem!” exclaimed a gay voice near.

Mr. Surrey turned quickly, “and what a mischievous smile you wear!” said he, rising, and placing a chair for Emily, “but I thought you were chained to the card-table.”

“I am set at liberty now, in order to go to the supper-table, and I am come to summon you to it. Don’t you see that mamma and more than half the company have already gone there?”

“Ah, I perceive; we must all be moving I suppose,” and he stepped forward with the intention of conducting her to the supper-room; at the same time Mr. Sandham advanced with a

similar purpose, observing which Mr. Surrey half retreated, but Emily arrested the movement by familiarly taking his arm, while she merely acknowledged, with a slight bow, the courtesy of the young clergyman. There was a thrill of pleasure conveyed in her light touch, and as while making some playful remark she turned her gay glance on the observant countenance of her companion, a kindling light rose to his earnest eyes, beneath which her own looks instinctively fell, while at the same moment she was conscious that she coloured deeply, and she hastily turned aside her face in almost painful confusion.

“You will find a change of room agreeable,” observed Mr. Surrey, in his usual quiet tone, “it is too warm for you here.”

Emily felt relieved, her heightened colour had been attributed to a very natural cause, and no doubt she had herself misinterpreted the meaning of the look that had for a moment been fixed on her. All her gaiety at once returned, and during the supper she talked and laughed with her usual careless vivacity.

Mr. Surrey, who sat beside her, was scarcely less animated, and their conversation became a playful war of words, rendered only the more piquant by the sentimental observations with which, every now and then, it was broken in upon by their neighbour, Miss Charlotte Harris. But Fanny, who was seated opposite, and who had been mortified by her sister's attracting a larger share of admiration than had fallen to herself, took no part in their cheerfulness: it was in vain that Emily from time to time addressed to her a laughing remark; not a word, not a smile, was elicited in reply, and Mr. Sandham, who sat next her, maintained also an imperturbable gravity, and appeared studiously anxious that his looks should not for a moment rest on Miss Gilbert, while on Fanny he bestowed only formal and almost silent attention.

"What cruelty have you been perpetrating to-night?" enquired Mr. Surrey, in a low voice, and making clear his allusion by a glance towards the young clergyman.

"I think I know what you mean," answered

Emily, "but really—" and she stopped short, blushing deeply.

"Ah! you do well to leave the sentence unfinished, there are some subjects on which young ladies never can be perfectly candid."

Emily was silent, but her cheeks became crimson.

"I assure you," she said presently, recovering herself, "that the request you heard referred to a bazaar."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, a sort of Fancy Fair. There is to be a new stained glass window at Holywell Church, and in aid of the fund required for it, some of the ladies of the parish have proposed holding a bazaar, which their own work is to furnish, and Mr. Sandham was endeavouring to persuade me to join in the scheme and to preside at one of the stalls."

"And this you refused?"

"Yes, I cannot neglect the family work-basket."

"Not for the sake of the Church?"

"No, not even for the sake of the Church, at least not for Holywell Church; but Doctor Bassett would tell you that working for home, or making home pleasant, or doing anything that is useful and good, is working for the Church."

"For instance," said Mr. Surrey, smiling, "making these nice jellies, and trifles, and tarts, on which we have been feasting to-night."

"Well, I hardly know whether he would go quite so far as that, but he would say it of Fanny's playing old music that she is tired of, on our quiet evenings for the sake of pleasing papa; and of Rhoda's giving up gardening that she is so fond of, and stitching Edmund's wrist bands instead; and things of that sort."

"And of your stitching my poor manuscript."

"Ah! I fear not," said Emily gravely shaking her head.

"Now what does that very serious look imply?"

"Only that the manuscript in question has nothing to do with the Church."

“How can you be so sure of that, young lady?”

“Oh! because you are a philosopher.”

“Are there no philosophers then, in the Church that Dr. Bassett speaks of?”

“Oh, yes, I forgot, there must be, for he calls the whole world the Church.”

“Very well, then, don’t be alarmed; you have done no mischief in lending a hand to the unfortunate manuscript.”

Emily smiled, but her attention was presently claimed by some departing guests, and Mr. Surrey stole back to the quiet study.

CHAPTER XI.

As Mrs. Gilbert and the two eldest girls were one day busily employed in packing up the various articles which they had prepared to send to New Zealand, Rhoda, with her little arms somewhat heavily burthened, came eagerly into the room, and setting down on the table a large and handsome writing desk, exclaimed with no little elation :

“ See what Mr. Surrey has given me for my present to Edmund ! ”

“ How very kind ! ” cried Emily, admiringly examining the desk, which was fitted up in the most complete manner, and well stocked besides with an ample provision of pens and letter paper,

"I do believe there is nobody else in the world as kind as Mr. Surrey is!"

"Ah! this is just like him—so generous and considerate," said Mrs. Gilbert.

"But why is it to be Rhoda's present?—why not his own?" asked Fanny.

Rhoda answered that she had to go back for something else, and after a momentary absence she returned, bringing as many books as she could well carry, saying Mr. Surrey hoped that a corner for them would be found in the package for Edmund.

Emily was impetuously flying off to express their delight to him, but was stopped by Rhoda, who told her Mr. Surrey had that moment set off on his walk.

"And on purpose to be out of the way of our thanks, you may be sure," said Emily. "Well, was there ever anything so generous?" she continued, beginning to inspect the volumes; "what valuable books they seem to be! and what a pile of them! Now the heavy parcel that came from London this morning is accounted for."

“Yes, and Mr. Surrey was so afraid that it would not arrive in time; he went late last night to the railway office to enquire about it,” said Rhoda.

“So you were in the secret! I wonder that he is so fond of taking a mere child into his confidence,” cried Fanny, pettishly.

“I must say,” exclaimed Emily, “I do think Mr. Surrey has a right to do as he pleases, and I am sure no one of us ought to find fault with him about anything. We have all cause enough to be thankful to him. Only think of his goodness in being here—a mere excuse for the generous aid he has afforded; what a relief it has proved to papa! I declare since Davis has returned to the office he has become quite himself again.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Gilbert, “your dear father’s health has very much improved; he is no longer overworked, and he is growing quite cheerful again.”

“And,” said Emily, “I am certain he feels more kindly towards Edmund, and this, I do be-

lieve, is in a great measure owing to Mr. Surrey. I heard him the other day talking to papa a long while about him, urging everything he possibly could in excuse for him, and remarking that his adventurous spirit would be very likely to ensure his success in a new country."

"And of course you agreed with him," said Fanny.

"Of course I did; it is exactly what I have from the beginning thought myself, only Mr. Surrey represented it more forcibly than I could do. And then he seems to have a great deal of knowledge about emigrants and settlers in general, and I could see that papa was very much interested and delighted with the accounts he gave, and that at last he came round to be quite of Mr. Surrey's opinion that Edmund's nature is one exactly suited for an emigrant."

"But we must make haste with our packing," suggested Mrs. Gilbert.

A little further delay, however, ensued for Mr. Gilbert and Andrew, in answer to an eager request of Rhoda's, entering at this moment,

Mr. Surrey's gifts were proudly displayed to them.

"There is only one fault here," said Mr. Gilbert, inspecting the desk, "it is far too handsome."

"And the books! Only see this pile of books, papa, and all of them in such good serviceable binding," cried Emily.

"Indeed, these are treasures!" exclaimed Mr. Gilbert, taking up the volumes one by one, and looking at the title page of each.

"And Edmund took out very few books with him," said Andrew, "and he must have read those over and over again on the voyage long ago, so he will be doubly glad to have these."

"Why, what a vast package there will be when all these things are put up!" said Mr. Gilbert, looking round upon the miscellaneous articles that lay about the room. "You have each, I believe, contributed something towards it."

"Yes, mamma, and every one of us: and Miss Dale also. And now you see here are Mr.

Surrey's beautiful presents to crown the whole. What a rich freight it will be!" cried Emily, "and how precious to Edmund!"

"Yes, coming from home, how dearly he will value it!" murmured Rhoda.

"And yet, my children, if I know my son's heart rightly, with all these treasures he will find one thing wanting, unless another gift be added," said Mr. Gilbert, with a slightly faltering voice. "Give him this then," he continued, detaching from his watch-chain an old family seal, and placing it on the writing-desk, "give him this then, in token of his father's love."

Emily sprang forward and threw her arms round her father's neck, kissing him again and again, while her tears fell fast over his furrowed cheek, and in broken words she strove to give utterance to her grateful joy, but she could only tremulously sob forth, "dear papa!—kind papa!—how I thank you!—how I love you!"

Mr. Gilbert strained her to his heart, and strove to kiss away her tears; but he could only

minge his own with them : and presently of that little family party there was not one with dry eyes—all wept for joy—all felt that full forgiveness was now accorded to the banished prodigal, and all requited the gracious deed with the heart's silent thanksgiving.

But in a little time composure was restored : Mr. Gilbert and Andrew returned to the office, and Mrs. Gilbert and the girls diligently resumed their occupation.

“How pleased Edmund will be with this!” said Emily, pausing in her labour, and looking intently at a small landscape in water-colours, which she was about to pack up, “this view of the sloping hay-field, and the old mill, and the little wooden-bridge crossing the quiet stream where he used to fish. And, mamma, see how beautifully it is painted! I do believe it is one of Miss Dale’s very best pictures.”

“She wished it to be so,” answered Mrs. Gilbert; “she said it would be well to keep alive in dear Edmund’s heart the remembrance of the favourite haunts of his boyhood; and she be-

stowed much time and pains on this little landscape."

"Ah!" said Emily, still looking wistfully at the picture, "I think I see him now, dear boy, with his rod and line standing just there, leaning over the broken rail of the bridge," and with her eyes swimming in tears, Emily began to cover the picture with one of the many folds of paper in which it was to be carefully wrapped.

"Mr. Sandham was calling on Miss Dale, one day, just as she was finishing the picture, and he tried hard to persuade her to send it to the bazaar for the Holywell church window," said Rhoda.

"Ah! as a gift to Edmund it is much better bestowed," cried Emily.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Fanny, "better than if it had been given for the sake of beautifying the church!"

"That simple country church is best as it is, in my opinion," said Emily, "and let them put there what painted glass they please, no heart

will be touched by it as Edmund's will at sight of this old home scene coming to him in a far country: dear fellow! I am sure, whenever he looks on it, it will bring tears to his eyes, gracious tears, as Miss Dale would call them.

"I don't believe that under any circumstances she would have given it for the bazaar," said Fanny.

"Very likely not. But I do think Mr. Sandham is too presuming in his requests. Mamma, do you like him?"

"I have no doubt he means well, my dear, and I think he would be very glad if *you* could like him."

"That I never can."

"And I know why," said Fanny.

"He does not please me," said Emily, blushing deeply.

"Ah, that is not what I meant," observed Fanny.

"I see no reason why he should not please you, my love," said Mrs. Gilbert; "he is certainly gentlemanly, and handsome; and, what is

are more important, he is, if report speaks truly, an excellent clergyman."

"A narrow-minded and bigoted one, as I think," said Emily.

"I dare say he is quite in the right, though," said Fanny.

"Yes, if intolerance is the right; but, be it right or wrong, I detest it," cried Emily.

"Hush, hush, my dear, you are a little too vehement," said Mrs. Gilbert. "Let us say no more about him; and proceed as quickly as we can with our work."

"I hope, after all our care, that the things will get safely to New Zealand," said Fanny, "but it is very likely, that somehow or other, they will all be lost: only think, the ship we send them by may be wrecked or burned."

"Well, you do conjure up pleasant visions, I must say," exclaimed Emily. "I hope and pray that dear Edmund is safe. What a happy day it will be when his first letter arrives! But oh, how long we must wait for it!"

"The time will soon pass," said Mrs. Gilbert, "it slips away very quickly."

"So, indeed, it does. I was thinking only yesterday, when I was reckoning up the number of weeks Mr. Surrey has been here, that they have seemed really to fly."

"And we must acknowledge, my love, that he has helped to make them fly very pleasantly."

"Poor Miss Dale!" cried Emily, "what a pity it is that she has been so ill almost ever since he has been here."

"Especially as he came for the sake of her society," observed Fanny.

"I don't think that; but of course he must regret that while here he has been able to enjoy so little of it."

"You believe, perhaps, that he finds attractions nearer home," said Fanny.

"I tell you what I believe," retorted Emily, "that it is sheer kindness and generosity which induces Mr. Surrey to stay here—that it is a mere excuse for his liberality towards us; and I should consider it unjust and ungrateful to impute to his conduct any other motive."

"You are quite in the right, my dear Emily," cried Mrs. Gilbert; "Mr. Surrey has given us

ample proofs of his disinterested goodness; and as to the intimacy between Miss Dale and himself it is no concern of ours; they surely may be allowed to manage their own affairs without animadversion from us."

"There is no harm in anything that I have ever said about them," cried Fanny.

"No actual harm, my love, certainly; and yet it is a little hard that a lady and gentleman of middle age cannot associate together without subjecting themselves to the idle imputation of entertaining for each other a tenderer sentiment than that of friendship."

"To be sure it is!" exclaimed Emily, "and I think Miss Dale would be very much annoyed if it reached her ear. I wonder though at what age people do give up being in love, as it is called. For my part I don't see why the old should not like one another well enough to marry as well as the young."

"You need not go far for an example, my dear," said Mrs. Gilbert, smiling, "your father and I certainly furnish you with one."

"I declare I had forgotten all about that at the moment," said Emily; "but you and papa were not old when you married; you are not old now."

"Not absolutely in the sear and yellow leaf, but old, nevertheless, in comparison with you young people, like the two friends we have just been speaking of."

"Miss Dale says there are some hearts that never grow old," cried Rhoda.

"And I know the kind of heart that she means," responded Emily, "it is one that sympathy feeds perpetually with new life; and she has herself just such a heart."

"She had such a tender smile and such kind tears in her eyes when she gave me the picture for Edmund," said Rhoda.

"Poor dear Edmund! she always liked him; and he was so fond of her! how he will prize the picture."

"And what a pleasure the unpacking of all the things will be!" said Mrs. Gilbert.

"Yes, how delighted Edmund will be!"

exclaimed Emily, "I think I see him now, his bright eyes full of joy, and in his eager haste tumbling one over the other all these little packages that we have so carefully made up, cutting a string here—tearing off a cover there—and hardly allowing himself time to look at one thing in his impatience to see another."

"But when he finds papa's seal!" cried Rhoda.

"Ah! that indeed will be the treasure of treasures!"

CHAPTER XII.

SPRING had now advanced; the earth was rejoicing in the vigour and freshness of renewed youth, and the clear blue sky was ringing with the music of the lark. In the early leaves of the oak there was yet lingering a light golden tinge, while the branches of the elm and the beech, covered with foliage of a deeper hue, were already yielding grateful shade. The fields and the hedgerows wore their freshest tints of tender green, and countless wild flowers with fantastic grace wreathed with delicate bloom the knotted trunk of many an old storm-bent tree, and to many a rugged bank, and many a pensive woodland nook gave a fleeting charm. Clear

rivulets flowed swiftly along, leaves and blossoms were gently stirred, and the soft concord of whispering breeze and murmuring stream, blending with other harmonious sounds innumerable, was lost in one gracious melody pervading all earth and air—melody so toned down by nature's unerring skill, that with no human feeling, whether of grief or gladness, would it jar.

In a cool grassy spot, where the light breeze freely played, and a spreading tree lent its kindly shade, sat Miss Dale, the pencil in her hand and the sketch book open before her. She was now convalescent; the pure breath of the young spring had brought the hue of health to her cheek, and the sense of vigour to her mind. There was a clear and cheerful light in her eyes, a serene expression on her lips, and in her whole mien an indication of renewed energy harmonizing with the aspect of the season. She looked long and intently on a portion of the landscape before her, then rose, advanced a few paces, and viewing it again attentively from her new posi-

tion, placed the camp chair she carried, and seating herself, began carefully to sketch. The picture she designed to paint would be charming; so thought Miss Dale, as after a few effective strokes, pausing in her sketch, she musingly contemplated the view before her. The graceful bend of the clear river, the overhanging branch of the old flowering thorn, that garlanded with snowy bloom, almost swept the shining ripples, which the golden sunshine, stealing through green leaves lightly moved by the soft wind, touched with variable lustre. The sloping bank, with its forest of broad-leaved plants, and the bare-legged urchin on its rugged edge, who, leaning eagerly forward with an outstretched osier wand, strove vainly to reach a full-blown water lily that, serenely poised on the water's surface, delusively seemed ever floating towards him. A little lower the river flowed almost in darkness, boughs thick with foliage over-arching and investing it with an intensity of shadow that was akin to gloom, and from the depths of this shadow a little boat was now emerging, its

sole occupant suffering it to float lazily along, impelled only by the gentle force of the current, while he, in a half recumbent posture, his head resting against the edge of the boat, fastened his eyes on a book, which he held so as to shadow his brow. But presently he was roused from his studious occupation; the course of the boat was impeded, the projecting root of a tree, perhaps, arrested its further progress; he must have recourse to the oar, and he took up the solitary one which lay at the bottom of his little skiff, and with it began to push vigorously against the hidden obstruction, and in a few seconds the light boat was floating placidly onwards. Soon, however, the oar was again in his hand, and in another moment, seizing one end of a coil of rope which was attached to the bow of the boat, he had leaped on shore and made the little cable fast to the pliant branch of an osier which overhung the stream, then hastily clambering the steep uneven bank, he speedily reached level ground, and advancing a few steps stood beside the camp chair.

"You are an idle boater," said Miss Dale, quietly looking up from her sketch book.

"You expected me here before?"

"I did not expect you here at all."

"No! did I not say that I would come?"

"Not that you would come to-day."

"Did I not say that when the sunshine stole through the green leaves, when the hawthorn's white blossom dipped into the stream, when one sweet bird sang—listen now—did I not say I should look for you here!"

"You are in a poetic vein, I think, to-day."

"And are not you? Is there no poetry there?" and he glanced over her shoulder at the unfinished sketch.

"The poetry of nature."

"But it is the poetic eye only that can read it," and he looked again at the sketch with which her pencil was still busy. "Ah, and there is my little boat! but there is no sign of anyone in it."

"Were you not invisible, reclining and dreaming at the bottom of it?"

“But you knew that I was there.”

“Who but you could I have supposed would allow the boat to drift at the will and pleasure of the fickle stream towards an unseen danger?”

“Danger! there was no danger in the slight obstacle it encountered.”

“No, but a little further on, the current is strong, there are eddies and whirlpools. This fair-faced stream would play you false if you ventured on it too far.”

“And I was just hoping to row you to the old wooden bridge, but you will not venture with me?”

“No, I have no predilection for a watery grave.”

“Not with yon floating lily for a monument? It would furnish the quiet tomb with an apt inscription, a trite memento.”

“In an unknown tongue,” said Miss Dale.

“Nay,” he said, “I should read it thus:—
‘Tranquil, immoveable, unapproachable.’”

“Should you read aright? See now how your pale lily sways to and fro, as the current flows on.”

“Yes, there is a slight symptom of wavering from time to time, beguiling the deluded seeker into the belief that he shall yet win it, nevertheless its place remains unchangeable, always aloof from the rash hand that would snatch it from its loneliness—it loves to be companionless.”

“It would not bear transplanting now; it has floated too long in the cold stream,” said Miss Dale.

“Ah! you and I both can furnish a homily on the baneful effects of protracted solitude,” said Mr. Surrey, as he seated himself on the grass beside her.

“Are you not taking a somewhat altered view of the subject?” gravely inquired his companion.

“What hard questions you put,” said Mr. Surrey, while a half conscious smile stole over his face, “suppose now that I in turn should play the inquisitor?”

“You would find nothing to repay you for the trouble.”

There was a somewhat long pause. Miss Dale

became absorbed in her sketch, and Mr. Surrey, not caring to interrupt her, moved his position a little further off, and leaning against the trunk of an adjacent tree, and pulling his hat over his brow, fell into a meditative mood.

He was roused out of it by an exclamation from Miss Dale. She had caught sight of Mrs. Copeland, who after advancing towards her, paused hesitatingly on perceiving that her friend was not alone. He looked up, and recognizing the lady whom he had twice before encountered, raised his hat. She slightly returned his bow, and then seating herself beside the artist enquired what progress she had made with her pencil.

“Very little to-day, but you will find here a few sketches to which I have put the finishing touches, since you last saw them,” answered Miss Dale.

Mrs. Copeland took the portfolio from her friend’s hands, and laying it before her looked among the drawings which it contained; but she had hardly begun her search when a sudden puff of the light air, sweeping by, scattered the

loose papers in every direction.

"Oh, what mischief have I caused!" she cried with a voice of consternation.

"None at all," answered Miss Dale, but as she spoke, two or three of the drawings were blown down the sloping bank, and presently they were on the stream.

Mr. Surrey sprang up and hastily unfastening his little boat, leaped into it and pursued the floating sketches; he succeeded in recovering them.

"They are not quite spoiled I hope," he said, as before handing them to Miss Dale, he endeavoured to free them from the water with which they had been saturated.

"I cannot forgive myself for the harm I have occasioned," said Mrs. Copeland, looking with dismay at the dripping papers.

"There has been no harm at all, only the occasion for a little agreeable delay," answered Miss Dale; "I assure you sketching is the pleasantest occupation I have, and I would willingly lengthen the time that I devote to it."

“ But I think you can have no more to-day,” said Mr. Surrey, “ so what shall we do? Shall we take a stroll a little further on ? ”

“ With all my heart; but let the stroll be homewards, for Mrs. Copeland and I have both a long way before us. And what is to become of the boat ? ”

“ It can remain where it is for the present; in the evening I can walk this way and row back in it. And now let us pack up the sketches very securely; and give me the portfolio, I will take charge of it, and the camp-chair I shall put into the boat.”

“ Very well; you shall do as you like.”

“ That is right; I could always manage better for you than you do for yourself.”

“ I don't admit that at all.”

“ There is no need to tell me so; I know you don't.” And Mr. Surrey walked off towards the boat, with the camp-chair in his hand.

“ What curious terms, Lousia, you and your friend yonder appear to be on,” presently observed Mrs. Copeland.

“Our intimacy is a little out of the common way, I confess,” answered Miss Dale, and she gave briefly some explanation of the circumstances that had led to its gradual progress.

“But do you find no danger to your feelings in this sort of familiar intercourse?” inquired her companion.

“My dear Jane, what need is there to take a microscopic view of the nature of this friendship? It is enough to feel that it is precious: it is the one sunbeam left on my path.”

Any remark in reply to this frank avowal was prevented, for Mr. Surrey approached: observing that a delightful breeze had sprung up he proposed that they should mount some rising ground near to enjoy it. “But confess,” said he, as they began to climb the green ascent, “confess that this—your favorite country—is lamentably deficient in high land.”

“Pardon me, my favorite country it is not,” answered Miss Dale, “nevertheless, it pleases me well. I like the quiet charm of its pastoral character; I like the placid mood which it evokes.”

"I thought," said Mr. Surrey, "that you delighted in a far different prospect—that the aspect of the ever-varying sea had for you an attraction that no other scene could possess."

"Yes, it was once so: but those restless waves would no longer harmonize with my spirit. Yon tame fields that lie stretched before us, accord well with my present aspirations, that are but for peace. I have done with the love of change."

"Ah! this mood of yours is the result of your having been too long stationary, and too much in solitude."

"No, it is from very weariness."

"Well, then, here you shall rest awhile; but when this weariness shall have passed, as pass it will, you shall look on the waves of the sea and the waves of time anew, and they will again bear to you a bright aspect."

"Bright with the mournful radiance of the setting sun," said Miss Dale.

"Nay, it shall be a tempered radiance, that falls midway between noon and sundown, and it shall light up a fair scene for you yet."

“Are you a prophet?”

“Have faith in my predictions, and you shall find that I am.”

“I need faith—faith in all things.”

“My dear Louisa,” cried Mrs. Copeland, “you are not so unhappy.”

“No, no; she is but half an infidel,” said Mr. Surrey.

“And that surely is half too much,” rejoined Mrs. Copeland; “but I know her well. She is not one of the faithless.”

“In every thoughtful mind there is, doubtless, some unseen depth where lies its anchor of trust,” observed Mr. Surrey; “but why,” said he presently, unwilling to pursue further the grave subject they had fallen upon, “why, while Nature is inviting us to contemplate her cheerfullest aspect, should we be thinking of anything but the pleasant sunshine of to-day. The very daisies, starring this green path of ours, seem rejoicing in their existence. What a blue sky is above! Ah! and listen to the lark: he is pouring forth his blithest song.”

“For the enjoyment of the daisies, as well as for ours, perhaps,” said Miss Dale, smiling.

“My dear Louisa, what a fanciful brain yours is!” exclaimed Mrs. Copeland.

“Oh, this is nothing compared to some of the vagaries that find place there,” cried Mr. Surrey.

“How severe you are upon me!” said Miss Dale. “For the future I must not give utterance to the whimsical thoughts that sometimes creep into my mind, stirring it with pleasant fancies, and letting in fantastic gleams to play across its dismal shade.”

“But, indeed, we cannot submit to be so punished; we delight in these cheerful fancies that so gracefully chequer the graver mood; without them the charm would be incomplete.”

Mrs. Copeland glanced furtively at her friend: Miss Dale’s cheek was rosy red, but the sunny breeze was freely blowing on it, and might well invest it with a transient bloom. “Ah! dear

Louisa," she thought, "the youthful heart and the youthful cheek revive again under genial influence; your summer is not yet all gone."

And Mr. Surrey also looked at the beaming face, and said—"We must repeat these pleasant rambles; they do you good. You are looking perfectly well."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE trim old-fashioned garden at the back of Mr. Gilbert's house looked quite gay now, as the cheerful noon-day sunshine fell on its smooth yellow paths and radiant flower plots, all neatly bordered with verdant box. The blithe chirping of birds and the hum of early bees made pleasant music there; and a pair of newly-awakened butterflies rising up out of the flowers, fluttering their jewelled wings, flew to pastime together in the sunny air. Little Rhoda, holding in her hand a few choice blossoms which she had been stooping to gather, now lifting her head, spied the gay playmates, and, with her broad garden hat thrown back and her bright waving hair

hanging carelessly about her face, stood watching their airy sport, her cheeks softly flushed and her eyes shining with gay light.

"Ah, my little queen, you are wishing for wings, and to be a butterfly yourself!" cried Mr. Surrey throwing open his study window and looking out upon the little paradise before him.

"No, no," answered Rhoda, "no, no; if I could have wings, I would not like to be anything so idle."

"Oh you would be a little dusky, laborious bee, would you?"

"No, I would be an eagle!"

"You ambitious little mortal!"

"I should like to look at the sun."

"And is not the earth bright enough to look at with all these beautiful blossoms and birds and butterflies?"

"But they will all die one day."

"No matter, my little moralizer, there will be others in their stead, and by and by another you and I to enjoy them."

"Are you talking philosophy to my little sister?" exclaimed a cheerful voice from an upper chamber window.

Mr. Surrey looked up and saw Emily's smiling face leaning forward.

"Has Rhoda told you our news?" she asked.

"No, come and tell it me yourself. Let us all three take a stroll in the garden!"

"With all my heart! I have just fulfilled my promise. Look here! Catch it now!" and there came fluttering down from her fair hands a silk handkerchief, in a corner of which were delicately embroidered the letters W. S.

"Thanks, sweet sister of charity," cried Mr. Surrey as he caught the flying treasure, and then smilingly contemplated the elaborately wrought initials, "thanks," and he thrust the handkerchief in his bosom.

"And what is our news?" he asked, as presently afterwards, with Emily's arm linked in his, he was pacing the sunny garden path, while Rhoda skipped gaily before them, "what is our news?"

"We are expecting a visitor. Mrs. Duckenfield is coming to stay with us for two or three weeks; you have heard us speak of her."

"I think I have heard you mention the name; and when is the lady to arrive?"

"This very evening."

"And she is to have Fanny's room," said Rhoda, "and Fanny is to go to Emily's."

"Yes, and Rhoda and I have been very busy this morning; I think you must have heard the bustle we made; we have been stowing away superfluous tables and chairs and very cleverly contriving to be able to install Fanny in the self-same snug little corner that she occupied years ago, when she was a good little girl; for you must know that my room was once upon a time our nursery and shared by us all."

"But you must not inconvenience yourselves in this way. You shall have my room. I will go off to the hotel."

"Indeed you must do no such thing: it would spoil all our charming arrangements; and it is quite an enjoyment to restore the old nursery to

its original state, it brings back a great many interesting recollections."

"What a delightful manner you have of extracting pleasure out of any little circumstance, that, to a person less amiable than yourself, would yield only annoyance! I have observed this happy propensity of yours in a hundred instances."

Emily blushed. "I don't deserve half the kind things that you say of me, Mr. Surrey."

"I say no more than I think. You don't believe that I am insincere."

"That indeed I do not: but somehow or other—"

"Well, what of somehow or other?"

"Why, somehow or other you regard my little sayings and doings with too much partiality."

"And if I do so, why is it?"

"Oh! I know very well that I am a little bit of a favorite of yours," she cried, turning her looks smilingly towards him, but she met a glance that she had once before encountered, and dropping her eyes she coloured deeply.

“Do you know more than this, sweet Emily?” he asked with a somewhat mournful voice, “do you know that I sometimes fear my solitary future will be the sadder for this pleasant visit of mine?”

“But why not live always among your friends? Why go into solitude at all?” she asked.

“My mind has become attuned to it: and elsewhere I have no place,” he replied.

“Oh, Mr. Surrey!”

“No, from time to time I find myself in some happy domestic circle, but I go and there is no void left—it closes again—it is complete without me.”

“That will not be the case here,” said she, laying her hand upon his with an impulse of tenderness.

“Yes—even here,” he answered, “and the friendly pressure of this dear hand,” he added, fondly folding it within his own, “must soon be to me but a sad memory.”

“Why should it be so?” she asked, but as she spoke she coloured in some confusion and softly disengaged her hand from his clasp.

“Nay, there is no need to pursue this subject further,” he said, “we have not fallen on a happy topic; let us dismiss it! Let us look into this beautiful flower,” he continued, gathering a newly-blown ranunculus; “what perfection of colouring is here! What living splendour lies in these soft petals! Even in her frailest and minutest works how lavish of her glory is nature!”

Emily took the flower from his hand and looked at it in silence, but her thoughts were wandering, and the varying colour in her cheek betrayed some secret emotion. Presently unconsciously she let the flower drop, and as they stepped forward it was trampled under foot.

“She is busy with some picture of her fancy in which I have no part,” thought Mr. Surrey as he noticed the little incident and perceived the changeful bloom of her half-averted countenance; and unwilling to interrupt her reverie he quietly left her side and advanced towards Rhoda, who had now stayed her gay steps and seated on a garden bench was intent on the arrangement of some newly gathered flowers.

"I am making a nosegay for you," she said, looking up as he stood silently watching her twining the stems, "and it is to be set in the midst of your books on the study table; it is to be the living book there."

"What a little sage you are!"

"And these," said Rhoda, pointing to some brilliant blossoms which lay on the bench beside her, "these are for Mrs. Duckenfield."

"I like my flowers the best."

"So do I," said Rhoda, "but the others are the brightest."

"And therefore better suited for a beautiful lady. Is not that it?"

"I don't think she is beautiful, but I almost forget; I can only remember that she was very good-natured and used to laugh a great deal, but I suppose she will be quite changed and very sad now she is a widow."

"Oh I thought there was a Captain Duckenfield!"

"So there was when she came to see us before, but he is dead now and that is why she is coming to talk to papa about her money."

“And a very pleasant thing to talk about when there is enough of it,” said Mr. Surrey.

“But I believe Mrs. Duckenfield can’t get as much as she has a right to have, and so she wants papa’s help that she may be able to get what she ought. She is a sort of cousin of ours. Isn’t it a funny name, Duckenfield? Sophy Duckenfield, as papa calls her.”

“It is a nice, cosy, cheery name, I think,” said Mr. Surrey.

“What name can that be about which you have so pleasant a fancy?” enquired Emily, who just then came up to them.

“It is the name I understand of your expected guest.”

“Well, I do assure you, it always seems to me that her name is just like herself; Sophy Duckenfield! I am persuaded there is no other name in the whole world that would suit her so well.”

“I am beginning to have a little curiosity to see the fair owner of it,” said Mr. Surrey.

“You will be the best friends in the world,”

returned Emily, "but you must take a little care of yourself."

"Why so, I pray?"

"Oh! the little lady can, in her way, be somewhat dangerous. When she was last here I do assure you that Edmund had enough to do to escape being bewitched by her; and he was a mere boy then, not older than Andrew is now."

"No wonder then if he were bewitched; boys are prone to love."

"Oh! I don't mean to say that there was any harm—anything like love in the case, for you know Mrs. Duckenfield was not then a widow."

Mr. Surrey smiled.

"I only mean," continued Emily, "that dear Edmund was taken with her lively manners, and a good deal flattered by the notice she bestowed on him."

"And what did Captain Duckenfield say to it?"

"Oh! the dear good old gentleman seemed quite content, for really his gay little wife was extremely good natured to him, and took care to make him comfortable in his own way. She

must have been dreadfully shocked to lose him; it was very sad, he died in India from the effect of some over-fatigue, and at a distance from his wife and child."

"There is a child, is there?" said Mr. Surrey. "How shall you contrive with your house full of guests? I really think I had better take the opportunity of making a run up to London."

"Oh! by no means!" cried Emily; "and the little boy is not coming here at all; he is to be left in Wales with his father's relations."

"Dear little David! How I should like to have him here to run about with in the garden!" said Rhoda. "But look at my nosegays now! are they not beautiful?" she cried, holding them up to view for a moment, "I must set them in water at once, while they are quite fresh," and she ran quickly into the house.

"What a little charmer she is! and how blooming she has become! To-day she is looking as bright as her brightest flowers," said Mr. Surrey.

"Yes, she is really looking quite pretty; and

she is the very sweetest and best little girl in the whole world!"

"Emily, Emily, are you ever coming in, or are you going to waste all your time out of doors to-day?" exclaimed a peevish voice, and Fanny's face, wearing a very discontented expression, appeared at an open window overlooking the garden.

"My dear Fan, I must have a little of this delicious sunshine: I wish you would come and enjoy it, too! Everything is made ready for Mrs. Duckenfield, so we really may indulge in a little idleness now."

"I hate idleness," cried Fanny.

"Not surely such idleness as we have here," said Mr. Surrey; "not the enjoyment of this sweet spring day! Do come out yourself."

"Pray do, dear!" entreated her sister.

"Oh! I am sure I cannot be wanted!" answered Fanny, shutting down the window.

"I am very sorry, but I must go in now, or poor dear Fanny will think it unkind," said Emily.

“I know what she ought to think,” observed Mr. Surrey, “that her sister has an angelic temper.”

“But, unfortunately, that would not be the truth, for my temper is not exactly a good one, it is too hasty, as I am sure even you, Mr. Surrey, must long ago have discovered.”

“I should utterly deny this if I did not fear the imputation of flattery.”

“Now you don’t really wish, I dare say, to make me conceited, but, indeed, you are running great risk of it.”

“That is what you never could be—yours is not a nature to admit of it.”

“Nevertheless, it may be wise to keep out of the way of temptation,” said Emily, laughing, “and therefore I shall run away from you at once,” and, quickening her steps, she hastened into the house.

“She is a delightful creature!” thought Mr. Surrey, as he continued pacing the garden-path. “She is a delightful creature! So honest-hearted, so happy herself in striving to make others

happy; and with spirit and energy enough to overcome a host of petty evils. Her nature is transparent as truth itself, and her impulses are all of a fine and generous character. How pleasant might she make any man's home! What cheerfulness and industry she would bring to it! She is the genuine woman, worth all the fine ladies in the world!" But at this moment there rose to his mind the thought of one who was a complete contrast to the subject of his eulogy—one whose influence he still remembered, but whose caprice, the true origin of his isolated position, he had ceased to regret.

The slender form—the pale, expressive countenance were again before him as he recalled the soft langour of manner alternating with the bright intelligence, or the playful vivacity, that had once so deeply enthralled him.

But these were of the past, and it was of the present that he had now need to consider. His meditation reverted to Emily—he began to speculate on the probable state of her affections—were they already bestowed, or were they still

free?—and if free, what mattered it to him—to him, so much further advanced along the path of life, and with the sting of early disappointment still rankling in his heart. Nevertheless, he would observe more closely—he would, at least, ascertain whether the avenue to that gracious heart lay open.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE conversation at the family dinner was this day more than usually lively, a great deal being said about the expected guest, whose sayings and doings during her last visit to them were now good naturedly discussed by the little party. Various were the droll anecdotes related of her, occasioning bursts of merriment even from Mr. Gilbert himself, with whom, however, it appeared that his fair kinswoman was somewhat of a favorite; and certain traits of candour and kindness of heart which peeped out among the recorded absurdities made this no matter of surprise to Mr. Surrey, whose attention had been caught by the spirit and vivacity with which many of the characteristic sketches were given.

The dinner had now been some time concluded, but the whole party, contrary to their every day custom, still lingered at the table, forgetting in their animated discourse the lapse of time, when suddenly they were startled by hearing a visitor's knock at the street door. Could it possibly be Mrs. Duckenfield who had arrived thus unexpectedly early? No, there was the sound of a footstep less light than hers would have been, and before they had time for further speculation, the room door was opened and a gentleman entered—a young man of slender figure, with a pale grave cast of countenance. On his appearance, all rose in sudden surprise, and all but one stepped eagerly forward to welcome him; but unheeding the friendly hands extended, he was in a moment beside Emily, who, trembling violently, her cheeks now red, now pale, stood grasping for support the back of a chair. As she raised her eyes towards the expressive glance that sought hers, and hers alone, Mr. Surrey, who was intently observing her, perceived the tender joy that beamed in them, and

hastily turned aside his gaze. There was no need to look again—no need, he thought, to remain as a further spectator of that interesting meeting, and at once quietly and unnoticed he slipped out of the room.

An hour or two later he was leaning out of the window of his little study, looking upon the garden; but the brightness had all passed away from it now. He shut down the window, turned from it, and for a few moments paced the narrow apartment rapidly to and fro,—then seated himself at his writing table: but the pen was not in his hand, neither was he inspecting the unfinished manuscript that had remained untouched since the early morning.

There was a soft tap at the door and,—

“May I come in?” was demanded by a plaintive little voice.

“To be sure you may!” And Mr. Surrey rose and opened the door to his little favorite: he smiled on her gently.

“Well, and what have you to say to me now?”

“Won’t you come into the drawing-room? It

is so pleasant, and we want you so much; Mr. Randall is there."

"That is the very reason for your not wanting me, I should think. And what a house-full you will have. My room will be wanted now, at all events, if it was not before."

"Oh, no, Mr. Randall is staying at his own home; he is only come here for a little while this evening, and he will be gone quite away in three days, for he cannot get longer leave of absence now that his ship is just come back, but by-and-bye he hopes to get a good long leave."

"And you will all be very happy when that time comes."

"Yes, we all like him very much," and Rhoda proceeded to descant on her pleasant recollection of the young officer's last sojourn amongst them.

Mr. Surrey continued silent, and by-and-bye taking up his pen dipped it in the ink.

Comprehending the mute hint, his little visitor ceased talking, and presently slipped quietly out of the room. Again alone, Mr. Surrey laid down

the pen, and gathering his papers together, locked them in his desk,—then went again to the window, and opening it, leaned forward to inhale the fragrance which rose from the quiet flower-garden beneath. The cool odorous air brought gracious refreshment to him as, pushing the heavy hair from his forehead, the light wind freely blew on it, and he gradually lost the sense of oppression under which he had suffered during the last hour or two.

There were still some bright streaks in the sky, and observing them, he determined to go at once on a walk to the common, where he would be able fully to enjoy the lingering light; and taking his hat, he sallied forth on his solitary ramble. Before he had concluded it the crescent moon shone forth, and a few glittering stars had one by one become visible, but so abstracted was his meditation that he had scarcely noted the soft transition of light. He had been mechanically pacing to and fro a portion of the lonely common, and thus, perhaps, for another hour he would have continued to pace it, had not the

train of thought into which he had fallen led him at last to exclaim mentally, "After all, friendship is better than love!" And at this conclusion his steps instinctively turned towards the Briars. He was soon at the well-known door—soon within the quiet painting-room, in familiar conversation with the gentle artist with a soothing sense of reconciliation to the course of events stealing into his mind. After some other discourse they had been talking of a new literary work, "I shall have it sent to me in a few days and I will bring it to you on my return to Woodridge," said Mr. Surrey. "Tomorrow, I purpose starting on a visit to an old friend of mine, with whom I shall probably spend a week or ten days."

"Is not this a sudden resolve of yours?" enquired Miss Dale.

"I am under a promise to make the visit before leaving this part of the country; and I may as well go now as later."

"I am surprised the girls did not tell me of your intended departure when I saw them this morning."

“They know nothing of it; I have not even mentioned it to them yet. In fact, I have only resolved on it during my walk this evening.”

“I think they will be disappointed at your leaving them just as their gay visitor, Mrs. Duckenfield, arrives.”

“Not at all. They will do much better without me; and they have another visitor now. There was an arrival this afternoon, and a very interesting one, I suspect, to one, at least, of the family.”

“Indeed! Is Charles Randall come?”

“He is,” answered Mr. Surrey, opening a portfolio, and bending over it. “What a fine head in crayons you have here,” said he presently, taking up one of the drawings and looking at it attentively; “I was not aware of your excellence in this style; this is quite new to me.”

Miss Dale was observing his countenance, and continued silent.

“And here is one equally good,” said he, taking up another of the drawings. “Ah! I recognize a portrait here: you have succeeded admirably; it is very striking.”

“I think it is a good likeness,” she answered, “and yet I am hardly satisfied with it. The features I know are correct, and the expression of the countenance is tolerably well caught, but it has less beauty than the original, perhaps partly on account of the absence of all warmth of colouring; for Emily’s fine bloom certainly contributes greatly to her loveliness.”

“Undoubtedly it does,” he replied.

“Her whole appearance denotes the harmony of health,” continued Miss Dale; “every look, every movement manifests it, and in this alone what a living charm lies!”

“Yes,” he responded; “throughout her being there is a concord that is very delightful; mind and matter in perfect unison, both alike fresh, vivacious, and joyous.”

“There can hardly be a stronger contrast between any two natures than exists between hers and her old friend and playfellow’s,” said Miss Dale.

“You refer to Mr. Randall, of course,” observed Mr. Surrey, still bending over the port-

folio, and seemingly occupied with the inspection of its contents.

“I do,” she answered; “and a very remarkable person he is, taking into consideration the circumstances of his life. His parents are common place people as possible; his education was meagre; and entering the navy at an early age, the greater part of his life has been spent on ship board, where one would suppose he must have been thrown chiefly in the society of the unstudious and thoughtless; and yet it is impossible to spend an hour in his company without discovering that his mind is cultivated and refined in no ordinary degree; that his moral perception is keen, and his sensibility excessive. There is something even in his appearance, I think, indicative of all this, something spiritual pervading it, investing it with delicate grace, altogether setting at nought one’s preconceived idea of a young sailor.”

“His appearance is exactly such as you describe. I was myself struck by it,” said Mr. Surrey, “and for the moment I saw him, it was, per-

haps, the more remarkable, for he was then obviously under the influence of powerful emotion.

“Do you think his affection is reciprocated?” she enquired in a somewhat hesitating tone.

“I do.”

Miss Dale glanced furtively towards Mr. Surrey as he gave this reply, but his countenance was completely concealed by his manner of holding before him one of her drawings as if for critical examination. In a little while, however, he laid it down without making any remark on it. There was a long pause in their conversation. Miss Dale occupied herself in slowly sorting, from a miscellaneous heap before her, blank paper suitable for her sketch book, and Mr. Surrey, with his elbow on the table, leaned his head on his hand, and fell into the thoughtful mood so common to him. There was, however, nothing remarkable in this taciturnity; thus the two friends often sat together, seemingly without any interchange of ideas, yet each in some measure conscious of the subject of thought of the other; and both perfectly content with this

mute companionship. By and bye, however, Mr. Surrey's abstracted mood passed and he turned again to the portfolio.

"You have something of everything here I find," said he; "the pen seems to have been no less busy than the pencil. I like some of these critical notes that you have made, they are very good."

"A little employment of that kind serves to vary my occupation, and therefore has its use to me," answered Miss Dale.

"But its use should not be confined to yourself; you should let others benefit by your observations. Your remarks are just and given in an admirably lucid style. Should the artist fail in the reward she deserves, she must turn to literary criticism; there I prophecy her success would be complete. But what have we here?" he continued, taking up a small scrap of writing; "here is something in the form of verse, and bearing your own signature too. May I read it?"

"If you can do so, certainly; but I fancy it is one of my almost illegible productions."

“No such thing, I can read it perfectly well, and it is admirable.”

“I don’t at all know what it is that you are commending.”

“Listen then,” and he read aloud—

“Why murmur we—why mourn—why fear
Because it is not ours to know,
In the mixed light and darkness here,
Whence come we—whither do we go?

“It is enough to know *we are*,
The origin, the end unseen :
Lo! poised in space is yonder star,
Untremulous, secure, serene.”

You must not allow your very orthodox friends to have a sight of these verses, excellent as in my opinion they are. Lock them in your desk. You are not half careful enough. Why run the risk of being tabooed by your matter-of-fact neighbours?”

“My being known as the writer of those lines could scarcely bring about such a catastrophe as that.”

“I beg your pardon, it would be very likely to do so; they might be considered to savour of sceptical philosophy; and although now the

spirit of inquiry is bolder than ever, on the other hand the orthodox get more sensitive than ever to the least deviation from orthodoxy. Take my advice, go your own way, but keep your own counsel."

"What you call my own way is a way into which you first led me," said Miss Dale.

"That may be, but to you, who are a thinking person, the subjects you have been lately revolving in your mind, the very spirit of the age would have brought before you through some other channel, if no such person as I had been in existence," returned Mr. Surrey.

"That is possible; yet, if indeed no such person as you had been in existence, how different in a hundred ways would have been my present state."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, I should not have fallen into this reclusive life: I should have been restless—unsatisfied—seeking varied companionship. Friendly communion with you has sufficed for the measure of enjoyment that I ever covet from society; and

under your influence my tone of mind has gradually risen—I am become wiser and stronger through my intercourse with you.”

“You are kind so to think,” said Mr. Surrey, “but you will become wiser and stronger yet, through the due exercise of your mental faculties. Any little benefit you have reaped from me has been simply this—the suggestion of higher topics of thought than are commonly discussed in promiscuous company; and this has been repaid a hundred fold in the enjoyment that your society has afforded me.”

“For my own part I rejoice unfeignedly in the accident that brought us acquainted,” said Miss Dale; “but we are too good friends to be bandying compliments with one another—and I am wanting to know something of this visit that you are about to make—Who is the friend you are going to see?”

“He is an old fellow student of mine,—Sir James Dalton.”

“His name is quite familiar to me; Broadleaze, his fine estate, I know lies in this county.”

"It does, and he has not long succeeded to it."

"Is he a family man?"

"He has been married two or three years and has one child. His wife is, I understand, a very accomplished and delightful person, but I have never seen her yet."

"When you come back from this visit the tone of our society here will strike you as very inferior," said Miss Dale.

"As you are aware, beyond my own friends I know scarcely anyone here," answered Mr. Surrey; "and in the family of the unsuccessful solicitor of an obscure country town one does not expect to find the accomplishments and elegancies of refined life; but where the nature is fine, a little outward polish may well be dispensed with, and in fact a deficiency of this sort is not unapt to give the charm of piquancy to a certain order of attractive qualities. I have not the slightest apprehension that on my return my admiration of true womanly graces will cease to be called into exercise."

“And there will be one at least of your party who will not fail to make a very decided claim on it; Mrs. Duckenfield will not be satisfied without engrossing the chief share of your attention.”

“I suspect you will find yourself mistaken; she will hardly think it worth while to gain anything so utterly valueless as my attention.”

“Well, well, we shall see; but rely on it I am right.”

“In idle speculations of this sort, you, so superior in many respects, are absolutely not above the very weakest of your sex; I have, before now, had occasion to notice this.”

“It is a feminine propensity, I suppose.”

“It is, at all events, a very foolish and dangerous one,” rejoined Mr. Surrey.

“What hard terms you use,” said Miss Dale.

“Not at all harder than the subject demands. Half the little kindnesses and amenities of social life may be destroyed by the indulgence of this nonsensical habit.”

“I very humbly confess my fault.”

"Confession without amendment will not content me. Do for the future abstain from this absurd trifling, it is quite beneath you."

"I will, indeed I will."

"You are a good creature," said Mr. Surrey, rising and holding out his hand, "farewell."

"Nay, I shall not allow you to take your departure just yet," answered Miss Dale, "and here, you see, is your prison fare," she added as Dinah entered and placed on the table some hard plain biscuits and a glass jug of water.

"A temptation which I cannot resist," said Mr. Surrey, re-seating himself and beginning an attack on the biscuits," but you must keep me in countenance."

"Oh, to be sure, we will enjoy this luxurious banquet together."

"I hope you will treat me as well on my return; I shall pay you a visit directly I come back. And now good bye. I shall start to-morrow, and very early too; I shall be off in the morning by the seven o'clock train."

"What, before breakfast?"

“Yes, and now I think of that, I shall steal a couple of these incomparable biscuits to sustain me on the way. And now I really must say adieu in good earnest, or I shall be locked out at home.”

“Don’t forget your promise of coming to see me on your return!”

“Could I possibly forget it?”

CHAPTER XV.

IT was towards evening of the following day when Mr. Surrey approached Broadleaze; for though he had started at an early hour of the morning, he had stopped midway on his journey, and attracted by the beauty of the country in the vicinity of the hotel at which he breakfasted, had devoted a great portion of the afternoon to exploring it; afterwards proceeding by a later train to a railway terminus, distant only about a couple of miles from one of the lodge gates of Sir James Dalton's park. Before leaving the Gilbert's he had taken care to place a note, addressed to his cousin, on the breakfast-table at which the family had not yet assembled; stating that the extreme

fineness of the weather, which could scarcely be expected to be of long continuance, had induced him to take advantage of it, by setting off that very morning on a visit to a friend residing in a distant part of the county, but that it was his intention to return in the course of the following week. He conjectured the exclamations of surprise which this announcement would call forth, but trusted the curiosity which his unexpected departure might occasion, would subside before his return.

Arrived at his friend's mansion, he was eagerly welcomed by Sir James Dalton, who received him with the frank cordiality he had so often experienced from him, when years before they had been students together at a Scotch university; and, the first dinner-bell having sounded, forthwith installed him in a pleasant suite of rooms commanding an extensive prospect. On his return to the drawing-room, he was presented by Sir James to Lady Dalton, who rose somewhat languidly from the sofa, on which she was half reclining, and then silently resumed

her place, bending her eyes on an open book that lay before her, and for the few minutes that intervened before the announcement of dinner, maintaining an unbroken silence. Mr. Surrey felt a momentary mortification at the careless reception vouchsafed him by the wife of his friend, but when presently afterwards, in obedience to a hint from Sir James, he stepped forward to offer to conduct Lady Dalton to the dining room, as she bowed her assent and rose to accompany him, he was struck by the pale refined cast of her countenance, and the extreme grace of her figure; and in his spontaneous admiration of her beauty his slight cause of annoyance was speedily forgotten.

In the conversation during dinner Lady Dalton took small part, but the little she did say, evinced delicacy and cultivation of mind, and the deference she manifested for the opinions expressed by her husband on various interesting subjects that chanced to fall under discussion, appeared no less genuine than graceful. It was, however, only on the approach of her child, a

lovely little girl about three years of age, who made her appearance when the dessert was placed on the table, that she warmed into animation; then the calm eyes shone, and on the clear pale cheek there stole the faintest tinge of the blush rose, while words of tenderest endearment came softly from her lips. The child clung about her in infantine fondness, but at a whispered word unclasped her little arms from around her mother's neck, and gently approaching her father climbed silently on his knee, where she sat grave and still in childish dignity; while he, without pausing in the conversation he was engaged in, fondly stroked her sunny hair; Lady Dalton bending on both looks of fondest love. It was a delightful picture, Mr. Surrey thought, and a philosophical axiom with which he was about to refute an argument of Sir James's passed out of his memory as he contemplated it.

The close of the evening was devoted to music; Lady Dalton sang, and her soul seemed to pass into her song. Mr. Surrey listened entranced, he could scarcely believe that the

incomparable songstress was the cold, calm woman whose reception had chilled him. When he had retired for the night, before sleep overtook him, he found himself studying this, to him new phase of feminine character; and in his dream the song, for which he had not found words to express his admiration, was repeated.

Very early on the following morning, Surrey was rambling in the park, exploring its most sequestered paths, looking into the newly opened leaves with philosophic eye, and revolving in his mind certain theories of the process of vegetable life. If other thought sometimes intruded, —thought that cast a passing shade of gloom over his countenance, it was soon resolutely expelled, and he was again absorbed in his abstractions, conscious of no other life than the life around him, which each moment of the freshly arrived spring quickened into more perfect beauty. What harmony of colouring lay on every side,—what golden gleams stole in, amid the varied tints of tender green! What music was in the air, what thrilling rapture in

the notes, so wondrously sustained, that seemed poured out of yon fleecy cloud of light, but beneath which the strained vision could just perceive a small dark speck, not immoveable; and now a louder burst of melodious ecstacy, and nearer,—nearer still,—a sudden pause;—joy drops silent on the earth.

The breakfast hour at Broadleaze was a late one, and notwithstanding his protracted stroll, Mr. Surrey on his return to the house found that he had not overstayed it. Lady Dalton had but just made her appearance as he entered the pleasant breakfast room, whose spacious window, opening on a parterre of rare flowers, admitted both the fragrant air and the warmth of the gay sunshine.

Sir James was occupied with his little daughter, telling her the name and something of the nature of a flower she had just gathered from the garden, looking down on her with grave tenderness, and conveying his interesting instruction in words adapted to the comprehension of her infantine mind; while she with her fair, soft face

upraised, fixed her large wondering eyes on his in mute attention to the mysteries he was revealing.

The entrance of Mr. Surrey caused no interruption, Sir James concluded his simple lecture, and bestowed a fond kiss on his little pupil, before he rose to give the salutation of the morning to his friend; and Lady Dalton, after a slight but graceful greeting, sat quietly presiding at the breakfast table. Her style of beauty appeared now even more striking than it had done the evening before, her calm, pale face, and smooth, broad forehead looking clear and serene as marble in the sunny daylight.

But if, from time to time, as her little daughter came prattling beside her, her countenance had not brightened into a smile of ineffable love, Mr. Surrey might have conjectured that the extreme placidity of its habitual expression betokened coldness of nature; now, however, he could divine the tender feelings that lay too deep to trouble the surface of her beauty, and believe in the felicity of his friend.

He was well aware that Sir James Dalton, as he knew him of old, was of a singularly susceptible and sensitive temperament, and painfully diffident of his power of inspiring affection. A slightly deformed person, the result of a spinal malady in early childhood, perhaps contributed largely to this somewhat morbid state of feeling; in other respects he had a finely-toned mind that was richly cultivated, and stored with varied knowledge. His countenance might have been considered a rare type of manly beauty, but for a certain incongruity of its proportions. The features taken separately were perfect, but in their combination the effect produced was unharmonious. This defect, so frequently the accompaniment of deformity of figure, was, however, greatly redeemed by the intellectual cast of the expression of countenance, and also by an occasional smile of rare sweetness.

That Lady Dalton, somewhat haughty, the grand-daughter of a peer, and richly endowed with wealth as well as beauty, should find satisfaction in the alliance she had formed, was

doubted by many; while the few who had sufficient discrimination to penetrate beyond the surface of her character, detected her fond pride in the fine intellect of her husband, and the tender attachment which made sacred her union with him. But so undemonstrative was her nature, that the casual observer might be pardoned for conjecturing that she was deficient in the sentiment of affection, and for attributing the endearments she lavished on her child to the mere prompting of maternal instinct.

Sir James Dalton's marriage had not weaned him from the pursuit of knowledge, but rather had given new zest to it. In his beautiful and accomplished wife he found, if not a companion in his more abstruse studies, at least a participator of his highest aspirations, and a reverential pupil of the philosophy which he was gradually unfolding to her. With the humility of a little child she sat at his feet and received instruction. Dwelling chiefly in the retirement of domestic life, the ceaseless din of the throng of fashion reached them only from a distance, and caused

no disturbance to the quiet tenor of their daily course. At rare intervals, for a short season, they took their place in the gay world, but always returned with renewed satisfaction to the peaceful shades of their own secluded and beautiful domain.

Mr. Surrey enjoyed to the full the refinement and serenity of the intellectual atmosphere which he here breathed. No jarring interests, no petty cares obtruded, no timid considerations held in check the calm advance towards the attainment of truth. There was no canvassing of conflicting creeds, no condemnation of nation, or individual, for matter of religious faith. A broader view was taken; mankind was seen struggling forward through countless dim and intricate paths toward one point—*light*.

Many and various were the philosophical discussions between the old fellow students. If their views were not always accordant, each held in respect the opinion of the other, and not unfrequently found in it occasion for further reflection and research, and through all the excite-

ment of argument, the perfect amity of their intellectual intercourse was preserved inviolate.

But the conversation of the two friends was not always of philosophy; they recurred often to the time they had spent together of old; to many an amusing incident of their college life, to pedestrian tours enjoyed together during the long vacation, to more than one romantic exploit they had shared, and peril which they had encountered. To these, and a hundred other circumstances, calling up a host of pleasant memories, did they frequently refer.

Sometimes their reminiscences led them into discourse of deeper and painful interest. Each had in his early manhood loved, and loved intensely; each had lost the object of his love; and each had confided to the other the unhappy fact of his bereavement. Long years ago Sir James Dalton had led his friend Surrey to a village churchyard, and there, in all the abandonment of youthful sorrow, had cast himself on a humble grave, the grave of his secretly affianced wife. And long years ago, in a crowded

ball-room, had William Surrey, with ill-concealed anguish, pointed out to his sympathising companion, the dark-eyed, slender girl leaning on the arm of a mature and languid man of fashion, for whom he, the young and earnest lover, had been capriciously abandoned.

Melancholy recollections, however, were rare, and only on one occasion did Sir James Dalton allude to this passage of his friend's life, and under the impression that this cruel disappointment was even now the latent cause of Surrey's solitary position.

But Surrey evaded the suggestion.

"I can blame no one but myself," he answered. "When not absorbed in literary pursuits I have, for many years past, led but a vagrant sort of life, affording little time or opportunity for the growth of those affections which could alone lead me to wish for marriage. And had it been otherwise, had I sought it, it is very probable that my inclination, wherever directed, would have met with no favorable response."

"You must allow me to differ from you there,"

said Sir James, "and now take my advice; give up this wandering, solitary life, and take to yourself a wise and tender companion."

"My dear Dalton, you forget that I am a monk of the order of poverty."

"I do not despair of you for all that; you will get a dispensation one of these days."

"From the Pope?"

"From the publisher!"

"Ah, well!" cried Surrey, "I must at least wait till then. I rejoice, my friend," said he after a short pause, "to find *you* rich in domestic happiness."

"No one is better aware than yourself," answered Sir James, "how little I expected to be so blessed. You know well that when one humble heart was stilled in death, I thought I had lost the only one that could ever love me."

"And you remember," said Surrey, "how vainly I used to lecture you on your morbid humility."

"On what you were pleased to call such, I do," replied Sir James. "But if I had not met with

one of a noble nature, one who discovering my hidden secret and finding in her own breast its response, could openly take to her heart the deformed student, and feel that by so doing she in no way degraded herself, I should still have been the unhappy recluse, fast bordering on misanthropy, which I was when you last saw me."

"Lady Dalton has done wisely; she has made a noble choice," said his companion.

"You little suspect, my friend Surrey, that you were the occasion of bringing us together."

"You are quite incomprehensible."

"I will explain myself. Our mutual admiration of a certain philosophical drama was our first approach to sympathy, and the foundation of an intimacy that gradually ripened into more than friendship." Mr. Surrey smiled.

"You have given a value to that little work which, otherwise, would be utterly worthless. It has been allowed to die, its very name is forgotten."

"It will have its resurrection with posterity," said Sir James.

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. SURREY had not been many days at Broadleaze before he obtained the privilege of free access to Lady Dalton's morning room. It was a charming apartment, simple in its appointments and pervaded by a chaste style of elegance, harmonizing with the aspect of its graceful occupant, who, devoting herself to the instruction and amusement of her child, or to her own pursuit of knowledge or accomplishment, usually passed there many of the hours which Sir James devoted to severer studies in his library.

Scarcely a day passed that Mr. Surrey did not avail himself of the permission he had received; he was always welcomed by Lady Dalton with a

quiet smile, while her little daughter would steal softly to his knee, and lispingly plead for a repetition of some enchanting fairy tale, invented for her amusement: or if he fell into conversation with her mother would sit silently on his lap, with her tiny fingers twining about his hand, and sometimes looking up into his face with a sweet wonder at some pause in his fluent discourse, the sound of which seemed to fall pleasantly on her ear, and to suffice for her tranquil enjoyment.

In the soft pressure of those waxen fingers—in the open gaze of those innocent eyes, he soon found a strange charm, and he could imagine that to bear the fond name of father might be the highest felicity of man. What was there in his own arid life that could be measured with a joy so tender and so holy? A sigh of vain regret alone answered the enquiry.

Among works of higher importance some of the light literature of the day was always to be found on Lady Dalton's reading table. She had a keen sense of enjoyment in the perusal of the

imaginative and well-constructed novel, where neither nature nor art was outraged for the purpose of enforcing theological dogma or moral axiom. Any true picture of life, any delicate touch of well directed satire, any shadowy form, which the wand of genius only could evoke, had for her infinite charm. For art's sake she valued the work of art, and for art's sake she revered the artist.

"I never close a book that has instructed, or even simply interested me," said she one day to Mr. Surrey, "without a feeling of lively gratitude towards the author; and more than this, for the mental feast that has been afforded me, I offer up a silent thanksgiving, no less devout than that which I give for daily bread."

"You have a true appreciation of the value of literature," he answered.

"Is it not, indeed, of priceless worth! Even from the miscellaneous heap of so-called light literature now lying before me, can you draw forth at random any one volume that is not in itself a treasure? Who can take up such a work

as this, for instance," continued Lady Dalton, "this charming pastoral, 'Our Village,' without feeling cheered and invigorated as with the breeze and sunshine of spring."

"Your selection has fallen on a pearl of price," cried Mr. Surrey. "Mary Russell Mitford is unrivaled—applied to subjects simple as those she has made choice of; so pure—so graceful—so racy a style as hers is not to be found."

And they proceeded to discuss other authoresses of the day, and the increasing influence of woman in literature.

"I imagine that you have a very high standard of female excellence," said Lady Dalton.

"Not so high that I do not see it frequently reached: no true woman falls short of it."

"May my little Lucy one day attain to it!" cried Lady Dalton, drawing fondly towards her her little daughter, who had now deserted her place on Mr. Surrey's knee to come and nestle softly in her mother's arms. "May my little Lucy be a true woman!"

"You could not breathe a wiser wish for her," said Sir James, who just then entered.

"Nor one more likely to be fulfilled, if from the bud we may prophecy the blossom that shall unfold," observed Surrey.

"I was just going to propose to you to come and look at the buds and blossoms of the field. It is a day of rare beauty. Come, Ellen, love, let us take advantage of it to show our friend Surrey, one of our favourite haunts."

"Let us go to Horden Cliff, and take our little Lucy, also," said Lady Dalton, "the drive will not be too long for her, and while we are enjoying the fine prospect, she will greatly enjoy running about in the breeze among the fresh grass and flowers."

Half-an-hour later the whole party, seated in an open carriage, were enjoying the delicious breeze and sunshine, as emerging from the park they swiftly passed over a broad, open road, on each side of which lay an extensive heath. A breath of the far distant sea mingling with the fresh fragrance of the newly verdant earth gave

vigour to the air, enhancing the power of delight, and suggesting free and expansive thought. There was little conversation carried on: Lady Dalton fell into meditation, and the fair child lay in her father's arms, murmuring a song of her own that had no words, but was expressive of the harmony that filled to overflowing her infantine breast. Sometimes her large, clear eyes sought those of her father's, which were ever tenderly bent on hers, and sometimes the long-fringed lids closed over them, but the song continued unbroken. The point of destination was soon reached, and the whole party were presently enjoying themselves in a more animated manner, walking briskly along the grassy level of the high cliff, that, overlooking a wide extent of country, and commanding also a view of the distant sea, was a favourite resort of the lovers of fine prospect and fine air. But now, besides their own, only one party was there, and this consisted merely of some ladies, who were slowly perambulating the cliff, with a little dog frolicking before them, whose gambols appeared

to create much of the pleasure they were manifestly enjoying. Little Lucy, with her nurse in attendance, running about on the fresh grass, was soon joining in play with the pretty spaniel, answering his sportive barks, as they raced together, with shouts of musical laughter.

Sir James and Lady Dalton, advancing to the edge of the cliff, pointed out to Surrey various objects of interest in the wide-stretched view before them. But he was soon satisfied with observing these, and presently fixed his attention on a small spot of the landscape that had for him greater charm—it was only a little verdant nook—a piece of sloping grass-land, with here and there a cluster of trees upon it; but lying there in deep peace, and chequered, as it was, with sun and shade, it formed, he thought, a charming scene, such a scene as a painter would love to transfer to the canvass; and hereupon his thoughts reverted to the friend whom he had so lately left in her quiet painting-room, and who, for the moment, he wished were now beside him;—and was it improbable that, at

the same moment, and looking perhaps on a somewhat similar scene, this gentle friend was wishing for his companionship? Was there indeed a latent sympathy ever drawing them, in thought at least, together, whatever the distractions that might seem to divide them? Here was a question of metaphysics, but he could not answer it, and smiled secretly at the inefficacy of his philosophy. Perhaps Lady Dalton suspected that his attention had wandered from her conversation, for she suddenly ceased her description of a portion of the landscape that lay half hidden by the woods of their own domain, and on the beauty of which she had been eloquently descanting, and stood silently contemplative, leaning on her husband's arm; while Sir James himself, by the aid of a pocket telescope, was tracing along the horizon the course of a far-off ship. But, abruptly and fearfully, they were all startled out of their meditations. The voice of little Lucy, which but the moment before had been sounding from the grassy flat, on which, under the care of the nurse, they had left her,

was now heard shrill and near, with the dog barking in concert; and a few yards in advance of the spot on which they stood, on a jutting portion of the cliff overhanging a deep chasm, they beheld the child, her light garments fluttering in the wind, her hat blown back, and her glossy hair and rosy face bathed in a flood of sunshine, while with her little arms outstretched in glee, and laughing and shouting at each perilous step she took, she was sportively retreating from the gambols of her playmate, the spaniel, who was joyously leaping towards her, her tiny steps approaching backward and unconsciously towards the extreme edge of the precipice.—Thus, for one agonizing moment they all saw her—the next, the dog alone was there, motionless—while a piercing cry ascending from the chasm, as of a bird wounded in flight, was for an instant heard—and then all was still.

Paralysed with horror, for a second the mother stood with parted lips, from which there was no power to send forth a cry, distended eye-balls, and stiffened outstretched arms — but the

paroxysm passed, and with a piercing shriek she was darting forward, but Surrey with a rapid movement placing himself before her, with a strong grasp arrested her. "Hold her back! Hold her back!" he cried authoritatively, in a voice that sounded strange even to himself, so hoarse and strained it was, "Hold her back—or you will lose them both!" and Sir James, feeling in despair that he was, through physical infirmity, utterly unable himself to attempt the rescue of his child, cast his arms round the struggling form of his wife and detained her, while Surrey, springing forward with a strength and agility which the exigency of the moment supplied, was the next moment on the spot whence the child had disappeared.

He endeavoured to gaze over the precipice, but in the attempt became dizzy, the jagged earth and fragments of stone swam before his eyes: he felt his danger and the utter uselessness of thus attempting to pursue his search; and retreating a few paces from the extreme edge of the cliff cast himself, face downwards, at full length on

the earth, then drew himself forward till the upper part of his body overhung the precipice, enabling him to take a secure survey of what lay beneath. But while thus preparing to gaze downward, he felt the painful beating of his heart, and for a moment his eyes involuntarily closed; but resolutely conquering the weakness he quickly rallied and cast an unshrinking glance on the depth below. His sight was at once arrested by a spectacle that filled his heart with mingled joy and fear. He beheld the child caught in the branches of a tree that sprang midway out of the precipice: her cries had ceased, and with mute terror she clung to the knotted boughs overhanging the stony steep below, whence no aid could come, for not a human being was there. Her rescue then must be attempted by himself alone; but so precipitous was the descent, so frail the support offered to his grasp in the rough brambles here and there growing out of the cliff, that the enterprise, he at once perceived, must be one of imminent danger. But at all hazards the rescue must be attempted.

Dexterously swinging himself over the edge of the precipice, he at once commenced his perilous undertaking. Almost at its outset it had nearly proved fatal. The first bough at which he caught broke as he grasped it, and the next moment a rugged projection of the cliff, on which he had attempted to find a stepping place, gave way—he was on the verge of destruction, but by a rapid manœuvre saved himself by catching at the bushes for support, and let himself down, from steep to steep, till he reached the tree which still upheld the terrified child. Quickly climbing it, he drew the little one into his arms, who clung about his neck in a passion of half-terrified, half-joyful weeping, and cautiously descending the twisted branches, bore her in safety to the rocky projection, from a cleft of which the tree sprang. But with this precious burthen, depriving him of the free use of his hands, how would he be able to ascend the precipice? Suddenly there occurred to him the idea of contriving, by some means, to bind the child to his shoulders. With the aid of little

Lucy's broad sash and his own silk handkerchief he speedily succeeded in accomplishing his design, and had no great difficulty in reasoning his little captive into a state of passive obedience. With her tiny arms encircling his neck he began to ascend the steep, from the summit of which the sound of shouts and piercing shrieks now distinctly reached him: he would at once have answered these cries with the joyful announcement of "All's well," but his undertaking was still full of peril—one false step would inevitably precipitate him to the yawning bottom of the cliff.

Fearful of inspiring false hope, in silence, therefore, except for a word of encouragement or endearment softly spoken to the little one, he continued to clamber upwards. The weight of the child was as nothing to him, but the close twisting of her arms about his neck occasionally caused, for a moment, a suffocating spasm in his throat that was no little impediment to his struggling efforts. She, herself, remained mute, either from terror or the dim consciousness that

her cries would pain and embarrass her kind bearer. At last, the ascent, so full of toil and hazard, was accomplished, and Surrey's head, with the little one's nestling beside it on his shoulder, projected above the edge of the cliff. A shriek of wildest joy hailed this almost miraculous appearance; and Lady Dalton narrowly escaped herself falling over the precipice, in her eagerness to seize her rescued treasure; while Sir James, whose limbs trembled from the violence of his emotion, vainly endeavoured, with outstretched hands, to assist Surrey's attempts to gain the summit of the cliff: this final effort was, however, presently successfully achieved, and with his precious freight he once more stood on the firm green sward. To release the little captive from her bondage—to press her again and again to their hearts—was the first impulse of the overjoyed parents; but when this irrepressible emotion had somewhat spent itself, they would have poured out their gratitude to the deliverer of their child, but words failed them: and Surrey, in little less emotion himself, mutely

pressing their hands, turned away, desirous of leaving them for a season to the undisturbed enjoyment of their unspeakable happiness in the recovery of their lost darling. As he was passing onwards, a woman, kneeling on the earth, weeping and trembling, seized his hand and bathed it with her tears. It was the child's nurse, through whose momentary inattention the fearful accident had occurred.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was Rhoda's birthday, and Miss Dale held an entertainment in honor of it. The principal rooms of her modest abode, thrown open for the occasion, wore a pleasant aspect as the guests came trooping into them; with the evening light shining through the lightly-draped windows on the pictures, the books, the flowers that lay carelessly scattered about, and illuminating a profusely covered table, at which Dinah, in high felicity, presided over a glittering tea equipage, a vast pyramid of the finest strawberries, and a curious variety of most delicate cakes of her own confection.

Little Rhoda, the queen of the evening, with

her eyes shining their brightest, and her glossy brown curls half hiding her softly flushed cheeks, looked quite charming in the pretty robe of white muslin with violet coloured ribbons, in which her sister Emily had delightedly arrayed her. With her hand locked in Miss Dale's, she blushingly received the congratulations that on all sides were offered her, and notwithstanding her timidity, responded to them with no little grace.

A few months had wrought a striking change in her. On her last birthday she had been regarded by ordinary observers as a plain, shy child; she was now in the eyes of all a lovely girl. Her ripening mind arriving at a new epoch, illuminated and beautified the little form that till then had, as it were, been dwelling in obscurity, and made lambent its gentle graces.

"Take care, my dear," said Mrs. Duckenfield, the Gilberts' visitor, to Emily, "take care, or that little sister of yours will very soon be in your way. Only look at her now—see the side glance of those soft eyes of hers. Can anything

be more enticing? And now, as she laughs and throws back her head, and shakes her pretty curls, what a charming little coquette it is! And pray who may the demure looking gentleman be who is calling forth these attractions?"

"Oh, don't mistake, my dear little sister's pretty, artless ways," said Emily, deprecatingly. "It is Doctor Bassett who is talking to her, and I can see, at a glance that she is playfully parrying some whimsical observation of his, he delights to provoke her to an arch repartee."

"Mr. Surrey has done a world of mischief to Rhoda," remarked Fanny, "making so much of her, and bringing her so forward; she was a mere child in her ways when he came here a few months ago."

"And so she is now," said Emily; "Mr. Surrey would be the very last person to wish her to be otherwise. He loves her very dearly, and the wisdom she has learned from him will never make her a precocious little woman, it is quite of another sort."

"I think it is almost time for you to give up

taking Mr. Surrey's part on every occasion," observed Fanny.

Emily blushed deeply.

"He needs no one to take his part, that I am aware of," she said, "if he did need it, indeed, such a time could never come to me."

"I suppose it is wise to have two strings to one's bow, but for my part I don't admire such an arrangement," said Fanny.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean something about friendship, and something about love."

"My dear Fan, how provoking you are!"

"Oh, it is very easy for you to exclaim in that way, but you can't contradict what I say; and how you blush!"

"I know that I do—I feel it. Pray, pray Fanny, say no more on this subject till we are alone at least. Do let this evening be a happy one!"

"Oh, with all my heart!"

"We must try to help Miss Dale in entertaining her company," said Emily, turning towards a table and opening a portfolio that lay on it.

"Here are some beautiful engravings, look, Mrs. Duckenfield; is not this 'Kentish Peasant' like our dear Edmund?"

"Wonderfully! only not half handsome enough. What eyes he had, Emily! I declare I have never seen such bright glances as his. How in the world could you let such a fine creature as he go to such an out-of-the-way place as New Zealand!"

Emily made no answer, shading her eyes with her hand, she bent silently over the picture.

"What is it you are so intent on?" presently said a voice close to her ear.

"Look!"

"Well, I can see nothing worth looking at."

"Oh, Doctor Bassett!"

"While there are living faces to contemplate I would not give a button for the finest portrait you could show me; and as for your painted landscapes, a patch of turf in a blackbird's cage, and a green bough in a flower-pot, tell me more about nature than all that the highest art has been able to produce."

"Fortunately, on this subject, there are not many who think as you do."

"I beg your pardon, very many are of my opinion, but have not the honesty to acknowledge it."

"Do you let Miss Dale know the low estimation in which you hold her favourite art?"

"To be sure I do: and this reminds me that I am deputed by her to escort you ladies to the strawberry feast."

"You must take charge of my cousin, Mrs. Duckenfield, if you please then, Doctor Bassett; if she can venture to place herself under the charge of such a barbarian as you have pronounced yourself to be."

"She will find me a harmless sort of savage," said the Doctor, offering his arm to the lady, "I shall not carry off her scalp as a trophy of victory."

"Oh, what a horrid idea!" cried Mrs. Duckenfield, with a little scream of affected alarm.

"Somewhat professional, I think," said Fanny.

"No such thing, I beg to remind you that I have nothing to do with the surgeon's knife."

"Oh, worse and worse!" exclaimed Mrs. Duckenfield. "How can you talk of such a horror?"

"My dear lady, I carry about with me an instrument of torture that is no less potent;" and he drew from his pocket a long used steel pen.

"Ah! I begin to think that you are altogether a very alarming sort of person; and I declare I am afraid to trust myself to you," said Mrs. Duckenfield, affectedly dropping his arm.

"You could not have arrived at a wiser conclusion," said Doctor Bassett, turning away from her abruptly, and approaching Emily, whose hand he unceremoniously seized, and tucking it under his arm led the way with her to the tea-room.

"What an uncivilized being he is!" exclaimed Mrs. Duckenfield, with a frown of genuine displeasure, as taking Fanny's arm she slowly followed them.

The tea table was already thronged, although

some of the later guests had not yet approached it. The finest strawberries with the freshest cream were profusely served forth, and Dinah's tea was excellent. The cool evening air stole in refreshingly at the open window, and all seemed to enjoy the simple banquet and the social pleasure of which they were partaking.

"How nice Dinah looks;—how fresh and happy!" said Emily.

"Yes; she is a fine creature; a *woman*," answered Doctor Bassett, "worth a hundred of your *young ladies*, who, with a few exceptions, of which, by the way, *you* are one, are synonymous with the silk gowns they wear; not an iota more valuable or more interesting."

"Well, they are ornamental at all events."

"Not at all in the eyes of rational beings."

"What would you have them do?"

"Scrub the floor, clean the grates. If they are without brains, they have at least hands and arms, and would be all the better for using them."

"I don't see why you should inflict on them such exceedingly coarse occupations."

“It is all they are fit for; and it is what creatures far superior to them do cheerfully.”

“You don’t mean to say that a housemaid, merely because she is a housemaid, is superior to a lady?”

“I mean to say that a human being, let his or her condition in life be what it may, who contributes even in the lowest degree to the order and comfort of civilized society, is superior a hundred fold to the mere idle consumer of the labour of others.”

“I quite agree with you there; but happily I don’t know one complete idler; every body seems to me to be doing something or other, and something that in one way or another is useful.”

“You don’t see clearly; your eyes are dazzled with sunshine, young lady.”

“I daresay I am not a very profound observer.”

“Well, such as you are, you do pretty well; we can’t afford to lose you. What is this story that I hear about your being likely to run away from us?”

Emily's clear cheek crimsoned, but she made no answer.

"I must have it explained to me," persisted Doctor Bassett; "are you going to entangle yourself in that miserable noose of matrimony? Is this your notion of making yourself useful? Are you going to escape entirely out of my jurisdiction?" he added in a more softened tone.

"Not yet; not for a long while."

"Young ladies are such extraordinary computers of time, that I should like to hear what you call 'a long while.'"

"An indefinite time, perhaps," replied Emily, smiling, and partially recovering from her confusion.

"Oh! that is to say, we may perhaps keep you amongst us for the next week only, or perhaps for the next twenty years."

"I do think you could very well spare me."

"No fibbing, if you please, young lady. You do not think any such thing."

"Well, I am going to try you at all events. I am going away to-morrow for a few weeks' visit."

“That is very considerate on your part; it is by way of breaking us in gently to bear with resignation losing you altogether.”

“Ah! you are very, *very* hard upon me.”

“Well, well, you are a good girl. Good bye, God bless you!”

“You are not going away yet, Doctor Bassett?”

“Do you think I have nothing better to do than to waste my time with all you idle people here?”

“Oh! but do stay a little while longer? You have not half made acquaintance with Mrs. Duckenfield yet.”

“I have made quite enough of it, I assure you.”

“You would find her very pleasant. And is not she nice looking?”

“Nice looking, indeed! Where is her mind? She is no better than a white plump pullet.”

“Hush, hush! she will surely hear you.”

“No such thing. Is not she listening, as if he were an oracle, to that solemn puppy who is

spoiling her strawberries with the cream he is pouring over them—your discarded admirer, Miss Emily?”

“Stay, stay, I cannot let you go away with such a notion as that.”

“What! you keep him dangling still, do you? And pray how have you disposed of the man in the clouds, the poet, the tragedy writer, who sets our fanciful friend, Miss Dale, dreaming; and plays too much upon your little sister Rhoda’s brain, I can tell you. You must take care of that child—I don’t half like her looks.”

Emily turned to him in alarm.

“What do you mean, Dr. Bassett?”

“I mean just what I say; you must take care of her. Lock up her books: let her run about in the open air from morning till night if she will. There is a lustre in her eyes that I don’t like.”

“Oh, Doctor Bassett! what is it you fear for her?”

“Nothing at all if you do with her as I bid you.”

“Are you quite sure?”

“What simpletons women are! One can’t

give a word of caution without frightening them out of their senses."

"But tell me truly, is there no cause for alarm?"

"None in the least, if you follow my advice; and remember that prevention is better than cure."

"You will talk to mamma about it!"

"Yes, Mrs. Gilbert is a sensible woman, and will at once see the subject in its proper light without letting her imagination run wild upon it."

"I think I had better give up this visit that I was going to make."

"I think you had better do no such thing. *I* will take good care that the books are put out of sight. We shall have made a dunce of our wise little woman by the time you come back."

Emily smiled through her tears; "Dear, kind Doctor Bassett, what should we do without you?" she said.

"Ah! pretty puss! what are we to do by and bye without *you*?" He shook hands and was gone.

Emily rose and went towards the window;

leaning forward, she lent over a white jasmine that was growing there, and presently its starry blossoms were wet with sparkling drops; but the evening dew was not yet falling.

There was the sound of a footstep slowly advancing up the garden path. Hastily brushing her hand across her eyes, Emily looked forward, and her cheeks, which the moment before had been paler than their wont, flushed at once into bloom, "Oh Mr. Surrey, how glad I am!"

"Steal away quietly and come and take a few turns with me here," he said in a low voice and looking up with the half sorrowful smile that sometimes made his countenance so eloquent.

She was beside him in a moment.

"You have been at home, of course?"

"Yes; and finding you all out, have followed you here as you see."

He returned the pressure of her friendly hand, but quickly let it drop.

"We have missed you very much!"

He looked into her eyes.

Emily blushed, "Yes, indeed we have! And

I am so glad you are come this evening; if it had been to-morrow I should have missed seeing you."

"And what is to happen to-morrow then?"

"I am going with some friends to stay a little while by the sea-side," she said, looking down, and colouring deeply.

Mr. Surrey was silent.

"Mrs. Duckenfield is with us, as I suppose you know," said Emily presently; "you will find her very lively and entertaining."

"I am on the wing myself, I believe. I am beginning to feel restless—to see the lakes and the mountains in my dreams."

"Oh, I do hope you will be here on my return."

"How long is it likely you will be absent?"

"Only a short time—only a very few weeks; and I hardly like to go at all, for Doctor Bassett has just said something that will make me very anxious about home."

"Doctor Bassett! I hope you are all quite well."

“Indeed I thought so till a few minutes ago, but he has made me very uneasy for Rhoda; he says we must be watchful of her, that we must take care her brain is not over tasked, that we must put books out of her way.”

Mr. Surrey looked distressed.

“I confess I have lately been somewhat of the same opinion,” he said; “you know that I put a stop to the German lessons on the plea of my own idleness, but the truth of the matter was I feared my dear little pupil was doing too much for her age and strength.”

“And I know how you have encouraged her to work in the garden, and how often you have amused her with country rambles, and how playfully you have talked with her. I ought to have told Doctor Bassett all this, for somehow or other I believe he has the notion that you have been exercising her brain over much; but really I was so taken by surprise at the caution he gave, that at the moment of his speaking to me I could think only of my alarm.”

“He did not tell you there is occasion for any

serious apprehension, I hope?" said Mr. Surrey anxiously.

"Oh, no; on the contrary, he gave me his assurance that all will be well if we follow his advice regarding her."

"I have not much respect for the opinions of medical men in general, and I am enough of a physiologist myself to be able to refute many of their dogmas; but two or three instances that have chanced to come before me lead me to think favourably of Doctor Bassett's knowledge and skill, and to feel confidence in his high integrity."

Emily's eyes glistened.

"He has been our kindest and wisest counsellor in many of our difficulties, and in time of sickness our only stay," she said; "and he will not receive even our thanks in return; we can only requite him by following his advice, 'if we think it worth having,' he says."

"In the present instance, at least, his injunctions must be implicitly obeyed," said Mr. Surrey; "I have myself noticed in Rhoda

symptoms of too great excitement following on close mental application; there has been a glitter of the eye that has often caught my observation."

"Doctor Bassett has spoken of this very thing."

"Well, we must indeed take all care of her; she must be let run wild in the fields as much as she pleases, and at home have nothing in the shape of literature, beyond an amusing story-book placed within her reach."

"Dear child!" cried Emily; "this is her birthday."

"I know it is," said Mr. Surrey.

"And kind Miss Dale is holding a festival in honour of it," continued Emily; "you will find quite a gay party assembled here. I have been so sorry all day, thinking that you would be absent from it, and you did not write a word to us. A letter for you has, however, arrived this morning; no, not a letter exactly, but a little parcel by post, which I put on your writing table; have you seen it?"

“Yes, thank you; it is all right. And now I must not detain you longer, or they will be wondering what has become of me; but I should like to have Rhoda here for a little stroll; the garden must be ten times cooler than the house, it would do her good.”

“I will send her to you directly. She will be overjoyed to find you are come back.”

Emily proceeded towards the house, but she stopped on the way, and stooping over the flower border, gathered one or two white carnations, then turning back for a moment she held them towards Surrey, “Are they not sweet?” she said.

He took them from her hand in silence, but meeting his glance she blushed.

“We are all wearing flowers to-night,” she said presently, as once more she turned away from him.

“Ah!” thought Surrey, as he pensively inhaled the odour of the carnations; “she fears lest I should misinterpret her simply gracious act of the gifts of these flowers; but it is my

own fault. Why do I not keep better guard over my feelings? I thought, too, I had conquered them, but now I see her again I find the victory is but half achieved. This weakness must be surmounted. Life is of higher purpose than for even a fraction of it to be spent in emotion that is unavailing. And what is it I regret? Cannot I be satisfied that others obtain happiness in the way which they seek? Have I not my own sources of enjoyment of which no untoward circumstances can deprive me! This sky, this earth, do they not unfold to me perpetually a boundless field for contemplative delight? If social ties were mine, should I not find in them, perhaps, fetters that would restrict the excursive flight of thought, that would chafe the perfect liberty of mind which hitherto I have sought as my chief good? It is best as it is. I am alone, and alone let me continue! Let me as of old throw myself completely upon nature."

His meditation was interrupted; a light step had approached him unheard, and now a little loving hand crept within his own. He locked it

very fondly in his grasp, and stooping down pressed his lips on the pure young brow that was lifted towards him, and around which the evening light played like a glory.

“My own pet!”

“How kind you have been to remember the day. I thought you would come. I recollected your promise to me long ago.”

“And are you quite well and happy?”

“Quite well, and quite happy now you are here.”

“Little flatterer! but how gay you are, Rhoda; you are a young queen holding her court I hear.”

“It is all sweet Miss Dale’s kindness.”

“Ah! she is always good, as you and I know.”

“Yes, indeed, and I love her very dearly, don’t you?”

“My love is not worth bestowing, Rhoda.”

“Miss Dale would not think so.”

“Yes, yes she would.”

“Try!” said Rhoda.

Mr. Surrey smiled:

"Ah, pretty one, you are taking a leaf from mischievous Fanny's book."

"No, it is all my own thought, and I wish, I wish—"

He playfully put his hand over her lips, and arrested the unfinished sentence.

"Let me tell you what *I* wish," he said presently, restoring her to the freedom of speech, but making a prisoner of her little hand, "let me tell you what *I* wish!"

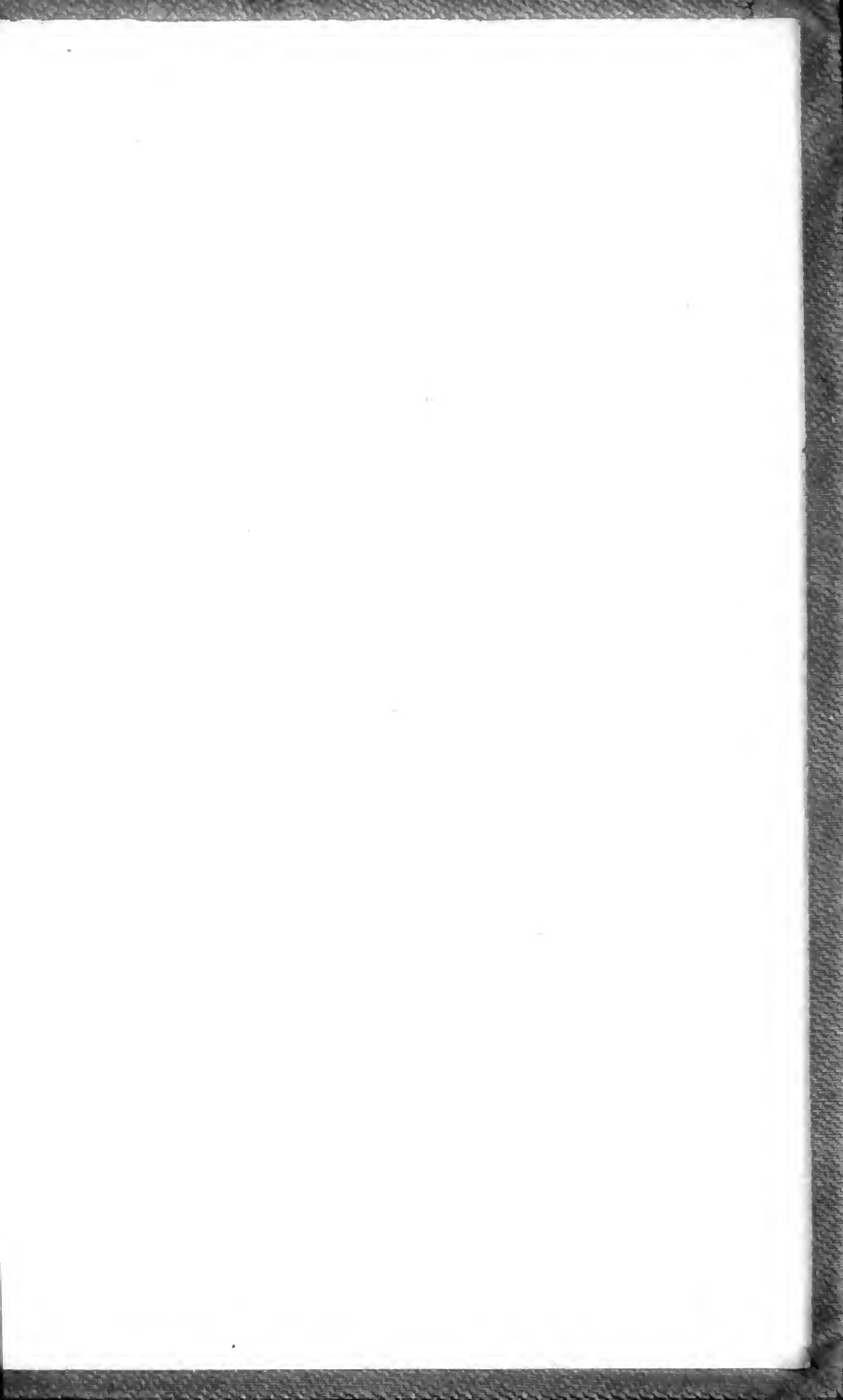
"What is it?"

"That you would wear this for my sake," and he clasped on her slender little arm an elaborately wrought silver bracelet.

Rhoda's eyes glistened—they were full of tears, she caught his hand and impulsively kissed it over and over again.

"I could never forget you without this," she said.

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